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More Lamorindans Now CERT-ified

By Cathy Dausman



Photo Cathy Dausman

Lamorinda now has more neighbors trained to help their neighbors when disaster strikes. The latest group of Lamorinda Community Emergency Response Team participants concluded their training during a night session Feb. 23 at the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District training center, bringing the total number of volunteers in Lamorinda to nearly 700 - a number which could easily reach 750 by year's end, says program manager Duncan Seibert.

This class was the largest to date, with 54 enrollees, but attrition and schedule conflicts whittled down the number of graduates. Seibert estimated about 34 completed the work this session. Lamorinda CERT is taught over six weekly evening classroom sessions and ends with a hands-on practical exam testing participants' knowledge and skills in the fields of first aid, search and

rescue, victim extrication and fire suppression.

CERT appeals to a wide variety of ages and abilities. Seibert says Lamorinda CERT taught residents of Orinda Senior Village, where the average enrollee's age was 80, and they welcome teens age 16 and up when accompanied by an adult. Gavin Flum of Orinda was one of the youngest CERT students to date; he attended with his father, Chris. The younger Flum is a former Boy Scout and current Orinda Police Department cadet who feels the CERT program is an opportunity to learn "every little thing."

"The more you know about everything the higher you'll get," his father added.

California seems to constantly teeter on the brink of one disaster or another - earthquake, wildfire or El Nino storms, and emergency responders have long preached the practicality of resident community preparedness. The Federal Emergency Management Agency website says the CERT concept was initially developed by the Los Angeles City Fire Department in 1985, and the program was made available nationwide in 1993. The Lamorinda CERT program began in the mid-1990s, when it was known as the Neighborhood Emergency Response Team, said Gordon Nathan of Moraga, the program's original trainer. Initially a responsibility of the then Moraga Fire Department the CERT program was administered for a time by the Lamorinda police departments. The Moraga-Orinda Fire District now administers CERT.

Lamorinda CERT is organized under the California Volunteers program and the Department of Homeland Security. It is one of 17 CERT programs offered throughout Contra Costa County. "We keep adding to our curriculum," Seibert said, and "it keeps changing." Lamorinda CERT has developed training modules dealing with communication and pet care during disasters, and shares new units with other CERT programs.

"I always thought about doing it [taking the class]," said Lafayette resident Gerry Robey. "You have to look after your neighbor." Robey learned about the class offering through an online neighborhood website; he plans to enlist a friend to help him set up a telephone tree for use during emergencies

in their area.

"When they're done, they can take care of their family, their neighbors and eventually organize their neighborhood," said Lamorinda Emergency Preparedness Coordinator Dennis Rein. He found the latest group "an interesting collection of people of all walks of Lamorinda life," and likes to ask each new CERT volunteer one final question: "What's next?"

CERT emergency preparedness sessions are offered three times a year, and are open to all Lamorinda residents or employees. The spring session in Moraga is already filled, but space is still available in the fall session in Orinda, which begins Sept. 7. CERT also hosts monthly perishable skills refresher courses the second Monday of each month at the Orinda Library.

"We're always open to teaching groups [of 25]," Seibert said. For details, call (925) 255-5143 or visit <http://www.lamorindacert.org>.



CERT trainee Bruce Sprague, left, and Adrian Durbin, right, treat mock victim Martin Valentines for injuries during the medical portion of their final. Photo Cathy Dausman

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