

# Sun Cities branch rolls with transit program

## Small emergencies keep local office busy, committed

By J.J. McCORMACK  
Daily News-Sun staff

Earthquakes, hurricanes, floods and fires.

These are the circumstances often associated with the American Red Cross.

"People think of the Red Cross in times of natural emergencies. They don't realize there are daily emergencies in a community like this — the person who has to get down to the doctor or the hospital," said Bill Wright, chairman of the Sun Cities branch of the American Red Cross, Central Arizona Chapter.

Because disaster rarely strikes the Sun Cities, Red Cross volunteers concentrate on dealing with the small emergencies that impact the lives of area residents daily.

The bulk of their time is devoted to providing free transportation to the area's elderly, low-income and disabled residents. Transportation volunteers also deliver meals, blankets and clothing to those in need.

The local branch's transportation service debuted 24 years ago. It is the largest of the 15 Red Cross transportation services operating across the Valley and the largest all-volunteer Red Cross transportation service in the country.

For six to eight hours every weekday, 11 red and white vans cruise Northwest Valley streets.

Doctors' offices are the most frequent destinations, although some area residents use the vans for other vital needs, including visits with ill spouses at local hospitals, physical therapy treatments and grocery shopping.

Each van is operated by the driver and his or her "buddy." The volunteer teams sometimes make as many as 11 trips a day, traveling as far as Phoenix.

The Sun Cities Chapter has 80 volunteer drivers. Some of them, like Fred Reid and Bob Matthews, have been driving vans for more than 10 years.

A desire to help others in need got Reid and Matthews involved in the Red Cross. The intangible rewards have kept them involved.

"The people really appreciate what we do," Matthews said. He particularly enjoys trying to cheer up his passengers.

"Sometimes they're a little down in the dumps when they go to the doctor," he said.

Wright joined the Red Cross 12 years ago and has no plans to quit his volunteer job.

"My feeling is we all have dues to pay during our lives. The day may come when I need help and I will feel better about seeking it," he said.

Reid has similar reasons for remaining active in the Red Cross.

"I appreciate my own good fortune and I want to try to help someone else."

Leading the local army of drivers is Dottie Leimbach, a longtime volunteer who has been coordinating the Red Cross' Sun City transportation service for 10 years.

The drivers affectionately refer to Leimbach as "First Sergeant."

"When she puts out the call, we answer," Reid said.

Leimbach jokes that she's been coordinator as long as she has because no one wants to replace her, especially when they hear how many hours she puts in.

At last count, she said she averages at least 25 volunteer hours a week scheduling drivers, training volunteers, scheduling daily pickups and ensuring the vans are main-

tained. Despite the long hours, Leimbach said she loves her volunteer job.

"It gets me out of the house and I have the cream of the crop volunteers to work with. I wouldn't do this if the volunteer drivers weren't so good," she said.

Transportation service volunteers logged more than 24,000 hours and 163,695 miles in 1991, said Mac Lund, spokesman for the Red Cross branch.

The demand for transportation services has climbed steadily over the years and along with it, the need for drivers, Wright said.

"The calls for service increase as the community ages. That's why the service is so necessary," Wright said.

Transportation service volunteers, both drivers and office helpers, are always needed. For information, call 972-3407, or stop by the Red Cross office, 9451 N. 99th Ave., Sun City.

(OVER)



Looking through comfort kits used for disaster victims are, from left, Bill Wright, Fred Reid and Bob Mathews. The three men are volunteers with

the Sun Cities branch of the American Red Cross. Besides producing comfort kits, the branch operates an extensive transportation network.

Frances Guarino/Daily News-Sun

## Sun Citians sew up relief role

Daily News-Sun staff

In addition to free transportation services, the Sun Cities branch of the American Red Cross has a production department and disaster services division.

■ Production department volunteers make handmade lap robes, foot warmers, therapy balls, sweaters, baby clothes and blankets, among other things. The items are donated to hospitals, nursing homes, to needy families and those suffering as a result of disaster.

Production volunteers gather the first Saturday of each month at the Sun Cities Red Cross headquarters, 9451 N. 99th Ave., to show off their finished work or collect additional yarn and other material they need to work at home.

Helen Cann of Sun City, a 40-year Red Cross volunteer, helped found the local branch's production department 17 years ago and remains an active member. Volunteers are needed to keep the production line going. For information, call 977-6588 or 972-3407.

■ Disaster service volunteers respond in emergency and disaster situations, working to provide shelter, food, clothing and other needs to the people in disaster-stricken communities. Disaster aid also is supplied to victims of fire, flood and other crises locally.

Red Cross disaster relief volunteers are needed for year-around work. For information, call 977-7696.

# Local Red Cross worker joins Hawaiian relief effort

*EDITOR'S NOTE: Claudia Schnagl returned from Hawaii Oct. 7 where she spent 23 days helping in the American Red Cross relief efforts following Hurricane Iniki. Schnagl is communications director for the American Red Cross, Central Arizona Chapter, in Phoenix. Here is her story:*

**By CLAUDIA SCHNAGL**

I have often heard mainlanders who have returned from a Hawaiian vacation describe the Aloha spirit of the natives. They said it was something that could not be explained, it had to be experienced first-hand. I now know what they mean.

My bags were almost packed and I was ready to receive final word to travel to south Florida to help with the Hurricane Andrew relief operations when Hurricane Iniki literally tore apart the island of Kauai on Sept. 11. That Sunday, Sept. 13, I touched down in Honolulu expecting to fly directly to Kauai. Because of a lack of minimum necessities like electricity and water, few hotel rooms were available. So, I remained in Honolulu for two weeks to help serve as a lifeline for our workers in Kauai.

Separated by more than 150 miles of water, the residents on Oahu bonded and held special events to benefit Red Cross relief efforts and those of other agencies. The one event that still touches my heart was the "Aloha Pumehana" (everlasting love) concert, an example of Hawaiian residents combining talents and concerns for their fellow human beings. It featured more than three dozen entertainers and musical groups who raised more than \$176,000 in a seven-hour period.

As the days passed and Kauai was slowly being cleaned up, more hotel rooms began to open. On Sept. 25 I was called to make my journey to Kauai, where I spent the remaining 11 days of my assignment. Although excited, I was slightly apprehensive because I wasn't quite sure what sights or experiences awaited me.

Although it had been two weeks after one of the most powerful storms to hit the Hawaiian Islands in recent memory, utility poles still littered the highways, entangled with branches, trees and debris. Traffic on the two-lane roads was backed up, mobile homes were flipped over, and older buildings in towns around

the island did not withstand the brunt of the storm and collapsed into heaps of rubble.

What amazed me most, as it did for the hundreds of Red Cross workers who flew in from all parts of the country, was not the destruction but rather the people who rose from the rubble left behind, rolled up their sleeves and got to work. Neighbor helped neighbor, friend helped friend. What Kauai lacked in basic necessities, they made up with undaunted spirit and an unflappable determination to look out for each other. It brought tears of happiness to my eyes to see so many pitch in to rebuild their lives. The determination of the people to build a new Kauai was as powerful as the storm itself.

Along the way, I developed friendships with some Kauai residents who always had time for a smile, a hug and a mahalo (thank you), especially when they discovered I was with the Red Cross.

There's one thing on Kauai that Hurricane Iniki didn't destroy and that is the indomitable spirit of its people. I now know firsthand the true meaning of the Aloha spirit.



Submitted photo

Hurricane Iniki left a swath of damage across the Hawaiian island of Kauai on Sept. 11. Claudia Schnagl, communications director for the Central Arizona Chapter of the American Red Cross, spent 23 days in the islands working with Red Cross volunteers.

# Arizona volunteer recalls Florida duty

Special to the Daily News-Sun

Imagine a city with no electricity, no running water and most of the buildings demolished. If you can picture this scenario, then you come close to the reality faced by Betsy Metzger, American Red Cross Central Arizona Chapter volunteer, when she arrived in Homestead, Fla.

"It was 25 miles of complete devastation. No pictures can adequately do it justice," recalled Metzger, a Phoenix resident who traveled to Florida this fall to assist Hurricane Andrew victims for three weeks.

Total estimates of Red Cross relief costs in Florida for Hurricane Andrew exceed \$84.4 million.

Almost 59,000 families are being provided assistance with rent money, vouchers for purchasing needed goods and mental health counseling. All Red Cross services are provided free to the victims of disasters through the financial donations from the American

people.

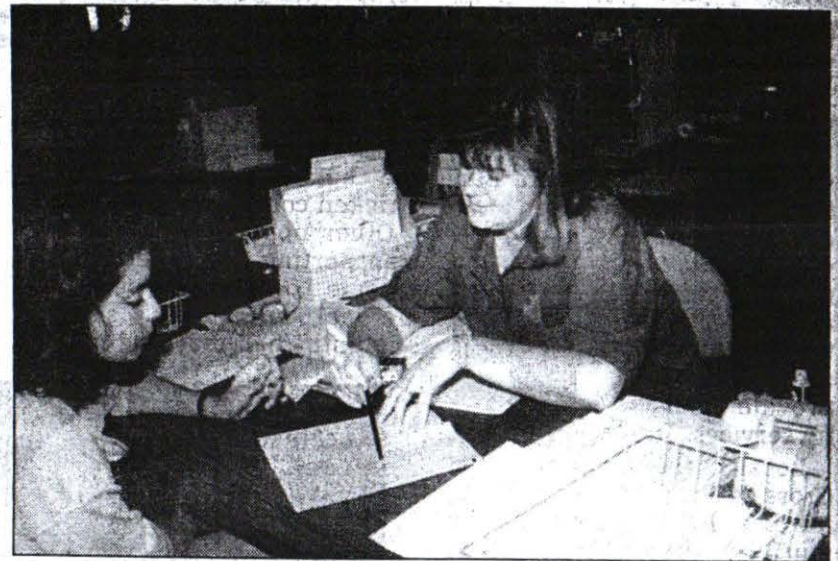
"The Red Cross really came through for the people of southern Florida," said Metzger. "The volunteers were very organized and knew how to take charge during a massive disaster effort."

"We helped the victims to meet their immediate needs such as food, medical care and shelter. The volunteers had to put some people in tents because so many buildings were destroyed."

More than 11,000 paid and volunteer Red Cross workers have staffed the operation to date, including six from the chapter. All endured difficult conditions to help those in need.

"Since hotel rooms were at a premium, and frequently went to the highest bidder, we constantly moved from one place to another. All the hotels left standing were in North Miami Beach, which was a long commute to Homestead," said Metzger.

"One evening, I remember collapsing on the bed right after I got in the door. When I woke up, I discovered my briefcase still clasped in my hand."



Submitted photo

Betsy Metzger, a volunteer with the Central Arizona Chapter of the American Red Cross, talks with a woman affected by Hurricane Andrew in south Florida.

Despite exhaustion, Metzger claims her volunteer experience was extremely rewarding. "I became a volunteer of the Central Arizona Chapter about 2½ years ago. In the future, I plan to take some national Red Cross classes for

working as a volunteer administrator during a disaster.

"Right now I'm volunteering about 16-20 hours a week at the chapter. I've found that the Red Cross supports volunteers in reaching their personal goals."