

INSIDE

CERT Training in Homer,
 pg. 1

CERTs in Action, pg. 3

Kenai Peninsula's Newest
 CERT: Homer, pg. 4

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CERT Training In Homer

by Catriona Lowe, Homer CERT Member

Well here I am a card carrying CERT-certified citizen of Homer. How did I reach this point? What does it mean to me?

I've long been intrigued by the thought of becoming a volunteer firefighter. Unfortunately, I have never felt able to devote the amount of time needed for that commitment. When I heard about the fledgling Kenai Peninsula CERT program I realized that it might well provide the opportunity for me to 'test the waters'.

Citizen Emergency Response Team... CERT....20 hours of classes and hands on training crammed into two short weeks. Several CERT teams have been started across the Peninsula during the past couple of years; I joined the first class to be held in Homer. I was surprised that there were only five participants; maybe next time there will be a larger turnout. We ended up having a

great learning experience together. All five of us had a different reason for signing up. Frank is a Ham radio enthusiast, and needed the CERT training in order to become qualified to be an official emergency radio broadcaster. Leslie is new to town and was looking for a way to meet others in the community. Mike wanted to brush up on skills he's acquired in previous emergency training sessions. Jennifer sought ways to ensure the safety of her family and community in the event of a disaster or emergency.

(continued on page 2)



Homer's first CERT course graduates (clockwise from left): Jennifer Nielson, Frank Vondersaar, Michael Coffing, Catriona Lowe, Leslie Calloway

(continued from page 1)

The lessons kicked off with a fairly predictable, generic introduction, but soon picked up speed from there. We learned many ways to mitigate problem areas in our homes and workplaces and general disaster preparedness, with the aim of being able to quickly move out from our own homes, and into the community to assist during a time of need. The most valuable, and fun, parts of the class were the hands on skills practicing.

The majority of the time was spent in a classroom at Homer High School, with the remainder at the Kachemak Emergency Services hall. The entire experience was given a sharp nudge of reality and relevance by the start of the Tracy Avenue fire. To get to our first Saturday session at KES hall we had to drive through the thick smoke at the intersection of Greer and East End roads. Later Paul, our instructor, was needed on the fire so one of our sessions was cancelled. The second time we were out East, the fire crews from all around the state were just breaking camp after their week of being stationed there to fight the fire. We watched one of our training videos in the RV which functions as a mobile Headquarters for incidents such as the Tracy Avenue wildfire.

It was fascinating to learn the theories of search and rescue, triage and basic first aid. It was daunting to contemplate what might be the reality if our new skills are ever needed. Participating in a mock disaster, complete with blood, gore, hysteria and corpses really made me feel that this class had only touched on the tip of the iceberg for me. I am excited to learn more during future training sessions. ■



Michael Coffing and another CERT member use a door to improvise a stretcher for a shock victim in their final disaster drill.



Catriona Lowe finds a victim under debris in the search and rescue exercise.



Homer CERT members tried out the Kachemak Emergency Service Area's pump packs. Frank Vondersaar demonstrates as firefighter Dan Miotke looks on.

CERTs in Action

by Kim Lorentzen, Kenai Peninsula Citizen Corps Coordinator

It's summertime on the Kenai Peninsula: the fish are biting (so are the mosquitoes!), yes, but Citizen Corps volunteers are still on the job and in classes. Here's an update of summer activities around the peninsula:

Homer: The first Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) class to be held in Homer took place in April and May. This group had a unique experience: they trained in the middle of the Tracy Avenue fire response. Classes were scheduled at the high school as part of the Homer Community Schools program, but the drill was at the new fire station by McNeil Canyon school. This was also the staging area for the Tracy Avenue fire response effort. The CERT members saw firsthand the Incident Command System in action, toured the borough's Mobile Communications vehicle, and did their fire suppression, search and rescue, triage and medical treatment exercises while the fire crew broke camp. Everyone did a great job and each new Homer CERT member deserves a big congratulations!

Many thanks to the Kachemak Emergency Services (KES) board for welcoming us into the new station during such a busy time. Thanks also to Dan Miotke, E.S.S., for helping out with the fire suppression exercise and to our volunteer victims at the search and rescue, triage and medical treatment drill. Finally, thanks to our instructors for this course: Paul Pellegrini with the KES board and Lisa O'Leary with Seldovia Volunteer Fire & EMS.

Cooper Landing: Hats off (or should we say hardhats off?) to the Cooper Landing CERT! CERT members there recently took the Tour Bus Incident Course that was offered as a joint effort between Cooper Landing Ambulance and Princess Tours.



Cooper Landing Tour Bus Incident Course



Bus Tour Incident students help with an extrication.

The exercise included tour bus familiarization, extrication and triage. The class toured an 11 passenger bus with a wheelchair lift, a 28 passenger bus and a 50 passenger tour bus. Students walked through the three buses and learned where to find all the equipment and emergency exits. Students also learned how to cut power from the batteries if necessary and assisted with a mock victim extrication using a backboard. (Thanks to Cooper Landing CERT Member Kay Thomas for this report.)

Anchor Point: Anchor Point CERT member Nancy Finney spent the Memorial Day holiday on the beach and in radio communication with the fire department and the Alaska State Troopers. The goal was to represent the program and community in the midst of the festivities and hopefully head off some of the problems that have come with beach parties in the past. This year's report was positive and Nancy was happy to share that families were celebrating together in a safe and neighborly manner. Congratulations to the CERT members from this year and last year who've worked to make this a safe holiday for Anchor Point! ■

If your CERT is participating in training, drills or volunteering for an event, please call, write or email the Citizen Corps office and let us know what you're up to! We'll include your event in the next newsletter so we can all share ideas and successes as we help to build stronger, safer, better prepared communities on the Kenai Peninsula.

Congratulations!

to our newest CERT members in Homer. These volunteers completed their Community Emergency Response Team training with a day of drills on Saturday, May 7. A big thanks to our new CERT trainers, Paul Pellegrini (KES) and Lisa O'Leary (Seldovia). The new Homer CERT members:

Frank Vondersaar
Leslie Callaway
Michael Coffing
Catriona Lowe
Jennifer Nielson

In addition to these new members, Homer resident David Ruffle did his CERT training in 2004.

Other communities with CERT members who have completed all their training: Anchor Point, Fritz Creek, Kenai, Soldotna, Cooper Landing. There are 56 current CERT graduates on the Kenai Peninsula.

Would you like to see
**CERT training offered
in your community?**

**Call the Citizen Corps
office at**

907-262-2098

**or go to our website at
www.kpvolunteers.org
to find out more
or request a course.**

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