

MARCH IS RED CROSS MONTH

By Sharon Aswad, Emergency Services Director
Southern Tier Chapter of the American Red Cross

As has been widely reported in our press, this has been a hectic season for house fires across Broome County. Interestingly, the pattern is repeating itself in the other four counties covered by the Southern Tier Chapter of the Red Cross (Chenango, Delaware, Otsego and Tioga).



Red Cross Photo- The Red Cross helped this couple after a fire in Binghamton. A Binghamton Firefighter talks with the couple.

Since January 1, we have been requested to assist victims of disaster at 24 incidents and 9 of these were multi-family events. The Southern Tier Chapter has committed financial assistance in the way of shelter, food, clothing and some medical related items at a cost of over \$21,000. Our ability to assist these victims is initiated by a request for assistance by the incident commander, the police, a neighbor or even the victim themselves. But, we must have a request in order to provide our humanitarian assistance. Therefore, we urge all those responding to an occupied house fire, a mass causality incident, flooding or any disaster to remember to call us. It is likely that we have a service that can help those affected.

We have "custodial" charge of a National Emergency Response Vehicle (ERV) and it has been used in responding to two of these incidents. The ERV is deployed in support of the responders, not the victims. We can provide refreshments and snacks to the firefighters, EMS or police agencies for those events that may take a few hours or more to control. We will also use it as a place to interview our clients. You may have even seen the ERV in parades.

The American Red Cross motto is "Prepare, Prevent, Respond" and this mission is broader and more far-reaching than just Disaster/Emergency Services and Blood Services. We have a multitude of other programs to offer our community. There are programs for youth, such as "When I'm in Charge" (home alone/after school training), Babysitter's training, Kits for Kids, Red Cross clubs, Masters of Disasters, Together We Prepare Scout Program, and Halloween Safety. Programs for families include: Be Red Cross Ready, Pandemic Flu Planning, Health & Safety classes, Pet First Aid, Services to Armed Forces and also International Tracing. There are also services to our senior population available such as NYSEG's Project SHARE Program, the Shopper Program, Disaster Preparedness Education for Seniors, Pandemic Flu Preparedness for Seniors and a Family Care

giving guide.

One of the great strengths of the American Red Cross system of local chapters is our reliance on locally recruited and trained volunteers. In the event of major disasters we rely on a "mutual aid" system that allows local resources to be rapidly increased with volunteers and



Red Cross Photo - Red Cross Emergency Response Vehicle

equipment from other chapter across the country, sometimes from around the world.

When disasters strike and less all encompassing, we respond with some of our own 550 trained volunteers. Fully 97% of our workforce here in the Southern Tier is made up of volunteers! Volunteers contribute in all areas of the operation from clerical and receptionist, to disaster response and victim casework, in special events, as instructors in Health and Safety, and much more. We almost invariably find a way for our volunteers to make a meaningful contribution to changing lives for the better....Join us today!

The American Red Cross is most definitely about changing lives, the lives of our workers and volunteers as much as those we assist and those who receive training and instruction in one of our courses. In the end, along with many other organizations we play a role in strengthening the fabric of our communal life.

Tonight, most of us will sleep soundly without experiencing an emergency, but not everyone will be so fortunate. For them, the Red Cross will be there. The Red Cross is not a government agency; it functions as a private organization with public responsibility. We stand ready, relying on the public's support and contributions of time, talent and treasure to meet broad community needs.

If you or your organization is interested in any of our programs, please do not hesitate to contact your American Red cross at 607-785-7207 or visit our web site:

www.southerntierredcross.org



Red Cross Photo- ERV provides beverages to firefighters in Vestal at a fire in 2005.