

RED ALERTS!



Keeping our volunteer partners engaged and informed



ON THE HORIZON

■ **Training Institute**, April 5-8, Holiday Inn, West Yellowstone. The Training Institute is an exciting opportunity to come together, receive some training and get to know one another. Check back for more details and sign-up information. We hope to see you there.



35

Disaster responses in November. Families helped: 38.



21

Volunteers joined us in November.



MILESTONES

BEVERLY BEEM, 15 years

VALERIE CROMWELL, 5 years

JERRY HAMILTON, 5 years

ROSEMARY WEBER, 5 years

TOM WOZNIAK, 5 years

IN MEMORIAM: MERIDIAN VOLUNTEER JANET LOPEZ

Losing a friend

Idaho nurse, volunteer found joy in delivering help, along with a smile

When Chris Volmer joined the Red Cross in 2017 as the disaster program manager for southwest Idaho, one of the first volunteers he met was Janet Lopez. Spring flooding in Ada County displaced families living in a mobile home community, and Volmer and his team opened a shelter in Eagle. That first night, after he had sent the rest of the volunteers home, Lopez stayed with Volmer until 5 in the morning.

“We kept the shelter open on and off for 10 days, and Janet was there just about every single day, running that shelter, providing health services to clients who came in and clients who were staying with us,” he said. “She was really a rock during that incident.”

A registered nurse in Meridian and long-time Red Cross volunteer, Lopez died of



cancer in November at age 62. She began volunteering with Red Cross in California more than a decade ago and continued that work for the past five years in Idaho. That included a wildfire deployment to California in 2013 and two trips to Louisiana in

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Red Cross helps sailor return for her grandfather's funeral

Normally stationed on the Navy destroyer the USS Milius in Japan, Andrea Barnes was on leave in San Diego when she got word that her grandfather Neldon Marshall had passed away. Barnes was scheduled to go back to Japan the day before the funeral, but her mother's phone call to the Red Cross of Greater Idaho helped Andrea extend her leave and fly home to Nampa to celebrate her grandfather's life

“I could just tell by the way she reacted she was really excited to be able to come,” Sharon said. “I think it would have been a huge disappointment and a hole in her heart if she hadn't been able to.”

Through its emergency communications program, the American Red Cross independently verifies family emergencies, helping the service member's commander make an educated decision when deciding whether to grant an emergency leave.

Last year, the Red Cross of Greater Idaho and Montana provided 473 emergency communications to military families.

For Andrea, her mother's call to the Red Cross jump-started the process so she could work with her commanding officer and apply to get her leave extended. And for Sharon, it meant having her daughter



home on an extremely meaningful day. Of the 57 grandchildren, 54 attended Marshall's funeral.

“I was so thrilled mostly because I didn't even really consider it to be a possibility,” Sharon said. “It was a real thrill for her to have the opportunity to see at least 44 of her cousins and most of her siblings. She got to see a lot of people that she wouldn't normally get to see and some of them she may never see another time.

“Her grandfather was someone really special.”

Co-worker's need starts lifetime of giving

Kurt Baltrusch was working for Montana-Dakota Utilities in the 1970s when a co-worker underwent an operation and needed blood. He and his colleagues decided to help out, setting in motion decades of donating.

“We got such a neat thank you from him I started giving whole blood off and on for quite a few years,” Baltrusch said. “I was in one time and they asked me if I wanted to donate platelets and I said, ‘What the heck



Kurt Baltrusch of Great Falls has been donating blood or platelets since the 1970s.

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Janet Lopez is remembered as a tireless nurse and a dedicated Red Cross volunteer. “She was a very caring person who really enjoyed helping others,” her son Jeremy Hamilton said.

Lopez: Very caring person

2016 in response to flooding. She also deployed following Hurricane Matthew in 2016.

Though Diana Ochsner never actually got to meet Lopez in person she considered the fellow Red Cross volunteer a dear friend.

“I feel like I know the soul that she is,” Ochsner said. “It didn’t matter what I was going through, whether I was on a deployment or dealing with a fire here, she always had my back no matter what.”

Ochsner first met Lopez online about a year ago. Red Cross was looking for someone to fill a disaster workforce services position, and Ochsner put an ad on her Facebook page. Lopez responded, and the two began to correspond.

Not long after, Ochsner deployed, and Lopez asked if they could stay in touch because they had formed a connection.

“And I said that’s fine with me, I love the idea,” Ochsner said.

Lopez was unable to deploy to recent disasters because of her battle with cancer, and that was tough on her, Ochsner said. But still she was there to support others.

“She was the kind of person, that even in her darkest moments, she was always uplifting to those around her,” Ochsner said.

“She had a knack for reading between the lines and knowing when something was wrong. She would tell me, ‘You’ve got this, sister.’”

Kim Monson, the nurse lead for North Central Division of Red



Janet Lopez’s vest is loaded with pins she received through the years recognizing her service.

Cross, remembers Lopez as a tireless nurse who spent hours caring for others in nursing homes, hospice facilities and the veterans’ home.

“She was always smiling and always willing to help with anything,” Monson said. “She had her emergency go-bag in the trunk of her car at all times, just in case.”

Volmer said earlier this year Lopez stopped by to drop off her Red Cross gear because she was undergoing chemotherapy, which was making her tired and it difficult for her to volunteer. The team deactivated Lopez, but six weeks later she called and wanted back on the roster and back helping people.

“Janet was everything you would want out of a Red Cross responder,” he said. “She was kind, she was compassionate, she had empathy and she would sit down with people and talk with them. She was never out of time to sit down and listen to

someone talk about what was going on.

“She was our Clara Barton.”

Lopez was never happier than when she was making someone’s else day a little brighter, her son Jeremy Hamilton said.

“She was a very caring person who really enjoyed helping others,” Hamilton said. “One of the things that brought her the most joy was helping out with the Red Cross, becoming a nurse and helping people whenever she could.”

Lopez was also a ham radio operator who would proctor licensing tests, Hamilton said.

Ochsner visited the Red Cross office in Boise recently and bumped a chair, knocking a Red Cross vest to the floor.

“I went to pick it up and wow was that thing heavy because of all of the pins,” Ochsner said, explaining that the Red Cross hands out pins to those who deploy to disasters or reach other milestones.

“I asked (Chris Volmer) ‘Is that your vest because I want it.’ ‘No he said, that’s Janet’s.’”

Ochsner recently returned from a deployment to Florida following Hurricane Michael. She hadn’t heard from Lopez in a while so the day she got back she went to her Facebook page to see if she had been posting anything. That’s when she got the news.

“I just feel like I’m missing a friend,” Ochsner said. “She should still be here.”

— Matt Ochsner

Baltrusch: Donated since the 1970s

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I’ll try it.”

Some 16 years later, Baltrusch has made 362 platelet donations to the American Red Cross and helped save countless lives – just one of many such donors, he points out.

“You hear stories of some of these people who were just about at

the end, especially the children, and you feel such compassion for them,” the 69-year-old Great Falls man said.

“It’s pretty simple on my part to come in every few weeks and hopefully help somebody.”

Baltrusch said his wife also donates blood and encourages others to do the same.

“I would tell people to come in and try it once and see how easy it is. Then listen to the stories and hear what these donations have done and how capable (you) are of helping.”

Schedule an appointment to donate blood or platelets at www.redcrossblood.org or by calling 800-RED-CROSS.