

RED ALERTS!



Keeping our volunteer partners engaged and informed



ON THE HORIZON

■ Giving
Tuesday, Nov. 27.



25

Disaster responses in October. Families helped: 34.



Congrats to Idaho Board Chair Roy Eiguren for receiving the Leaders in Law Lifetime Achievement Award from Idaho Business Review.



55

Volunteers joined us in October.



MILESTONES

KERRI STRASHEIM,
15 years

KENNETH GIRTON,
10 years

TAN NYGUYEN,
10 years

VIRGINIA HAVILAND,
10 years

DEBRA MARMON,
10 years

LANA WATSON,
5 years

TINA WILLIAMS,
5 years

IN MEMORIAM: MONTANA VOLUNTEER LEANN JOHNSON



Volunteer Leann Johnson, center, seen here with Idaho volunteer Diana Ochsner, left, and regional CEO Nicole Sirak Irwin, right, gave two decades of service to the Red Cross of Montana. In October, Johnson passed away in her home in Missoula.

‘A hero to me’

Remembering the work of a Red Cross treasure

For Sandy Cain, Montana volunteer Leann Johnson epitomized what it meant to be a Red Crosser.

“She’s the kind of person that if Clara Barton was in the same room, she would have wanted to talk to Leann,” Cain said.

Cain worked with Johnson for close to a decade, serving with her on several disaster operations, and admiring her wit, her passion and her ceaseless commitment to helping people when they needed it most.

In October, the retired school teacher passed away at the age of 67 in her home in Missoula after 20 years of Red Cross service.

“She was a hero to me, and I feel incredibly blessed that I got to know her and laugh with her,” said Cain, now a regional volunteer engagement lead in Oklahoma and the regional disaster officer’s volunteer partner in Idaho and Montana.

“She was just a treasure. She was this hilarious spitfire. I just adored being in her presence.”

Cain said she loved hearing Johnson’s Red Cross stories, stories that often revolved around Johnson doing whatever it took to serve the mission and take care of people.

One story really resonates with Cain.

Johnson was on disaster relief operation — Hurricane Katrina, Cain believes — and the sun was beating down as Johnson stood outside a shelter with a huge line of people. Cellphone in hand, Johnson began making her way through the line, one by one asking folks if their families knew they were safe



“She’s the kind of person that if Clara Barton was in the same room, she would have wanted to talk to Leann,” Sandy Cain said of Johnson.

and if there was anybody they needed to call.

“Just hearing her talk about that and the passion that she had for helping people because that’s such a huge psychological factor to feeling safe, knowing your family’s OK and your family knowing you’re OK,” Cain said.

“It was just another day for her, because that’s what she did. It was amazing the ease at which she spoke about this incredibly important work that she did. I felt like a little kid when you’re in kindergarten and everybody’s on the floor and you’re cross-legged and listening to your teacher. She

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Idaho volunteer goes the extra mile

During his deployment following Hurricane Florence, Red Cross disaster spiritual care volunteer Bruce Wenigmann met a man staying at a Red Cross shelter who was battling diabetes. The man had already lost one toe and was in danger of losing his whole foot because of infection.

The two had formed a connection, and when the time came for the man to go to the hospital for sur-

gery, Wenigmann went there to see him — a generous act that didn’t go unnoticed.

“Many spiritual care folks could have rationalized that there are chaplains at the hospital that could care for this man’s spiritual needs, however Bruce made the trip to the hospital to visit and minister to the man,” wrote Richard McCarty, a

SEE WENIGMANN, PAGE 2



Johnson: ‘Very genuine’

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would tell these stories and I was just so in awe of her hard work and her dedication. She lived it.”

During her two decades of service, Johnson filled many roles including as a caseworker for the International Services Restoring Family Links program, duty officer, recovery casework manager and as a national expert on reunification.

She is credited with helping thousands of families reconnect following disasters.

“Leann was very well known across the entire Red Cross for her amazing work in reunification,” said Colleen Tone, regional disaster officer for Montana and Idaho. “She was one of the most remarkable volunteers I’ve ever had the pleasure of working with. She was always asking, ‘what can I do for you and how can I best support the mission?’”

Tone admired Johnson’s tell-it-like-is style.

“She was super fun and kind of sassy, but when it came down to it, she was a no-bull individual who got the job done,” said Tone, who worked with Johnson for 13 years.

Johnson was the casework manager for the Kamiah wildfires in Idaho in 2015 when 75 homes were destroyed and played a key role during a plane crash in Butte in 2009. Tone was serving as duty officer when word of that crash came in, and Johnson jumped in to take over that role so Tone could get on the road and get on site.

When the situation was tough, Johnson always knew what to do.

Cain remembers getting in a bind during a disaster response operation. Johnson was her first call.

“I remember walking out into the parking lot and calling Leann and explaining the problem,” Cain said. “And I remember her having this



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SHARE YOUR MEMORIES:

Do you have thoughts or a story about Leann? Email matt.ochsner@redcross.org and we'll include them in an upcoming edition of RED ALERTS.

very matter-of-fact explanation to me — that people are more important than the policies. That the heart of the matter was taking care of people and not letting the policies get in the way of doing the right thing. That had such a profound effect on me. She was always that person to me.”

After spending six years in Missoula and a couple years in Billings, Cain lives in Oklahoma now. When her grandmother passed away a

year ago, Cain opened her mail and found a card from Johnson.

“That just speaks to Leann,” Cain said. “She was authentically caring. She just was very genuine.”

Johnson is survived by her husband, Kent, who is also a Red Cross volunteer. Together, as part of the Disaster Operations Volunteer Escapees program, they drove their RV to disaster locations, deploying nearly 30 times.

The family is planning a memorial service this spring.

Tone and Cain said Johnson can never be replaced.

“I’m so glad she taught us well,” Cain said. “It’s up to the rest of us now.”

“There will never be another person like her.”

— Matt Ochsner

Wenigmann: Retired pastor, chaplain

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disaster spiritual care lead who worked with Wenigmann during the deployment. “This reflects favorably on Bruce and upon the American Red Cross, demonstrating an above-and-beyond commitment to our clients.”

Wenigmann appreciates these kind words, but said he was simply doing what he thought was right.

“I was little surprised, because to me it’s a natural thing to do,” he said. “If we’re here to prevent and alleviate human suffering, then you should be with them in that kind of situation in the hospital so they know they’re not forgotten.”

Wenigmann, a retired United Methodist pastor and chaplain who lives in Boise, spent three weeks in the Wilmington, N.C., area, visiting families in shelters and making sure their needs were met, spiritual and otherwise. He spent much of his time helping these families find resources they needed as they began the long recovery process.

Spiritual care is a relatively new role in Red Cross disaster response, added because spirituality is so

important in many people’s lives.

He said the situation in the Carolinas was difficult — affordable housing was in short supply before and now is even harder to find following the storm — but admired clients’ determination.

“It was very difficult to place people, especially if their preference was to stay in the local area,” he said.

“It’s very very hard because they have been uprooted. But all things considered, people were holding up relatively well, but it’s tough.”

Problems that existed in these communities before become even more pronounced when disasters like Florence strike, he said.

“The disaster exposed the huge unmet needs that were pre-existent to the disaster and just how much we need to really try to address some of those conditions so it’s not so bad the next time,” he said.

Like on any deployment, things can change quickly. Partway through his deployment, Wenigmann was asked to step into a supervisory role on short notice after the previous supervisor moved

on, a change that Wenigmann said was unexpected.

He didn’t miss a beat.

“He performed magnificently,” McCory wrote.

Florence marked the second Red Cross deployment for Wenigmann, who also went to Florida following Hurricane Irma last year. He was deployed to California in November to assist with wildfire relief.

And while these deployments are exhausting, Wenigmann said when he’s there he feels like he’s where he needs to be.

“It is a painful privilege to be part of people’s lives during disaster,” he said. “I felt very honored to be part of the recovery process and learned much from our clients on how to handle disaster with grace and dignity.”

“It’s part of my calling to be with people who are in crisis and who have suffered trauma, to help them come to terms with what they’re going through, and to help them move forward at least with the initial steps. To know they’re not alone, that people care.”

— Matt Ochsner