

LOCALNEWS

FLOOD 2014

Decker helps at home

Local Red Cross volunteer assists with flood relief

BY EMILY GEDDE
Staff Writer

When disaster strikes, John Decker is not far behind. The Northern Minnesota Region Red Cross volunteer has seen his share of destruction. From the horrific scene of the Joplin tornado to communities washed away by Hurricane Irene, Decker has been there to offer his assistance. And now, he's helping out at home.

While recent flooding events have caused no loss of life and buildings are still standing, Decker said he and other Red Cross volunteers treat this local disaster like any other.

"Every disaster is the same whether it's a total devastation or it's this frustrating flood that creeps up on your house day by day," he said. "Someone whose house has two inches of water in it, to them, that disaster is as big as the person who lost their house in Joplin. We always have to remember disaster is as bad to them as another disaster. This is their everything they could be losing."

For the past two and a half weeks, Decker has been

logging some long days. The co-owner of Decker's Family Care has been spending about 17 hours each day as a Red Cross responder only to come home, catch up on his business and family for a few hours, and then do it all again the next day.

"I learned right away (from this disaster), that it's almost more stressful when it's at home," he said.

Fortunately, Decker has no personal property impacted by Rainy Lake's rising waters, but he is still feeling a loss.

"I don't have a personal loss, but I have a community-felt loss that I bring home every night," the Falls native said. "It is definitely more stressful and tiring when it's in your home area."

Still, Decker said he's not slowing down until the end.

"We're in this for the long haul," he said. "We will be here helping until the end."

Calling in help

It's been almost three weeks since June 12 when Decker reported to City Beach in the pouring rain with a handful of other volunteers to offer his help filling sandbags.

The next day, Koochiching County Sheriff Brian Jespersen approached Deck-

er with questions about how to call in the Red Cross – should matters get worse, which they quickly did.

"I told him he just needs to give me the word and we're here," Decker said of a Red Cross team. "The next day, we had a team in place in town and up and running."

Since then, Red Cross responders have been working with county staff and delivering food to those in need – some in remote locations.

"Getting to some people in remote locations has definitely been a challenge," Decker said.

While food service is only a small slice of the pie in what Red Cross does, Decker explained, The Salvation Army has been a close partner along the way.

"The importance (of food service) depends on the situation and we couldn't have done it without The Salvation Army," he said.

Other components

In the last three weeks, Red Cross volunteers have also been assisting county staff in relief efforts.

"We are a small team of nine, but we have many areas of specialties," Decker said of the Red Cross.

One person's duties in-



Northern Minnesota Region Red Cross volunteer John Decker of International Falls has traveled the country in disaster response. Now, the co-owner of Decker's Family Care, is helping with flood relief efforts in his hometown. Here, is stationed at Kerry Park last week, where hundreds of volunteers poured in to help fill sandbags.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

volve communications reporting in almost "real time" with offices at the local level in St. Paul as well as the national level, he said.

In addition, disaster assessment teams have been working closely with the county assessor documenting damage to homes and coming up with a count of how many properties were impacted and to what degree.

"It helps the county as well as our organization prepare for how many people we may need to shelter and provide food for," Decker said.

Right now, he said teams are gearing up to help in mental health areas.

"A big part of Red Cross is treating the response at the beginning as impor-

tant as the recovery phase at the end of a disaster," Decker said, noting public and mental health are key components to a recovery phase.

"We go through different phases of a disaster – from the honeymoon phase when we're all panicked and helping each other to now when we're fatigued," he said. "Some people have lost a lot, others haven't had any big losses yet. This is a marathon, not a sprint. It's harder on people to sit and watch the water creep in on them every day. They start to feel helpless."

'Amazing' effort

Decker said he has seen a lot of devastation in his four years with the Red Cross and watching communities pull together in a time of crisis never ceases

to amaze him.

Borderland is no different. "This is amazing," he said of watching the community react. "One day we had more than 950 volunteers come through to help sandbag and most of them have no vested interest in this other than they want to help someone in the community they don't know."

And, he gave a nod to efforts by emergency managers and department heads for pulling together, even though some had never experienced something like this before.

"Everything just came together," Decker said. "We don't have tremendous loss right now because of the things everyone did as a team that first week. Otherwise, there could have been more total loss out there."

RLMC upgrades emergency department services

JOURNAL STAFF REPORT

Rainy Lake Medical Center has recently received a grant to help improve its tele-emergency technology.

The Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust awarded RLMC with a \$292,000 grant to provide the institution with 24/7 access to an emergency department located in Sioux

Falls, South Dakota.

The hub employs board-certified physicians and specialists that provide telemedicine services to more than 85 hospitals in the



Dan Odegaard

midwest. According to a release, at any time, RLMC emergency department staff will be able to press a button for immediate, synchronized audiovisual connection to the tele-emergency hub.

The new tele-emergency hub will work as a forum for physicians to seek second opinions and receive additional help if needed.

"Having consulting board certified physicians and specialists available at the touch of a button will improve the quality of emergency services we offer to Koochiching County," Dan Odegaard, RLMC chief executive officer, said in a release. "We are very excited to provide the community with such advanced technology."

Tele-emergency technology is in the final stages of installation in the emergency department, and announcements will be made once the service is up and running.

Another new addition to the emergency department includes doors to the two hallways entering the emergency department. According to a release, this

will enclose the emergency room, making the department safe and secure for patients and their families.

"The addition of these doors to the Emergency Department will play a pivotal role in making our patients feel more comfortable with their privacy and security at our facility," Odegaard said in a release.

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