

REMINDER

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Emergency Management Director Gives Presentation to Community

BY ANNIE GENTILE ReminderNews

What should Vernon citizens do when they are hit by a natural or man-made disaster? Where should they go if they are evacuated from their homes? Who do they turn to for basic necessities such as food, fresh water and shelter?



Michael Purcaro provided an overview of local emergency management services.
- Photo by Annie Gentile.

On Jan. 27, the Rockville Community Alliance welcomed Vernon Emergency Management Director Michael Purcaro to provide an overview of emergency management services in town. He talked about how the town works with local, state and federal partners to prepare for, respond to and recover from large- and small-scale emergencies.

The presentation focused on family preparedness and ways that individual citizens can get involved to better assist emergency managers if a disaster occurs.

The Rockville Community Alliance is a collaboration of residents, businesses, non-profit groups, religious organizations, as well as the town of Vernon and other stakeholders who are dedicated to improving and preserving the greater Rockville area of Vernon. Like the Alliance, Purcaro said emergency management is all about connecting the dots and coordinating all the resources available to the town.

Purcaro was appointed to his position in December of 2004. He helped Vernon become the first town in the state to obtain Government Emergency Telecommunications Service cards – an emergency telecommunications voice service – for all chief officers in town. Vernon was also the first town in the state to get satellite phone radios, funded through a Homeland Security grant.

“We started with a total budget of \$35,000 for the Office of Emergency Management , which wasn’t nearly enough,” said Purcaro. He said that while other towns are often satisfied to wait for anticipated state or federal funding for emergency management items, Vernon has been far more aggressive in going after grant money.

Most recently, Purcaro participated in a deployment to Galveston Island, Texas, with the Connecticut Disaster Medical Assistance Team after Hurricane Ike slammed the coast of Texas. He shared a slideshow of photographs that illustrated how quickly a community can be overwhelmed by a disaster. “The devastation was unbelievable,” said Purcaro, who clicked through numerous slides of flattened homes and businesses, destroyed vehicles and boats literally thrown onto the streets. The lack of operating sewers, running water and electricity made operations very difficult.

On the local level, the biggest concerns are emergencies caused by major snowstorms, flooding and hurricanes, or a major vehicular accident with a truck carrying dangerous chemicals, Purcaro said. Presently, the town has a public warning siren system and a Wide Area Notification System that they would put into play in the case of an emergency. Vernon Center Middle School has been designated as a distribution center for emergency commodities, such as ready-to-eat meals, but other areas could be set up if the need arises.

“Emergency managers recognize that we can’t do it all on our own,” said Allen Sheridan, deputy director of OEM. For that reason, a Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) program has been established by the Office of Emergency Management for residents interested in learning how they can train to learn basic disaster-response skills to assist their families and neighbors in the case of an emergency. The program is a collaborative effort between the towns of Vernon, Ellington and Somers. The first group of about 40 residents is expected to complete the program in March. Trainees in the program will learn how to assist in running shelters, administering first aid and distributing commodities.

For information about the CERT training program, contact Allen Sheridan at 871-3142.

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