

REMINDER

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Family Preparedness Day Draws Thousands to Henry Park

By JESSICA CIPARELLI, Staff Writer

VERNON — The U.S. Department of Homeland Security, the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Mitigation and Community Relations units, the North Central Health District, the Connecticut National Guard, the State Health Department Medical Command, the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), the State Homeland Security department (DEMHS), the Vernon Fire Department and Vernon's Office of Emergency Management all converged in Vernon's Henry Park, but it wasn't for an emergency situation. Instead, they were at Henry Park to help avoid emergencies.

"The purpose was to raise awareness of emergency preparedness for families and to provide families with resources that they can use to better prepare and respond to all types of emergencies – man-made and natural," said Michael Purcaro, Vernon's Emergency Management Director. Purcaro, along with Captain Bill Graugard of the Vernon Fire Department, Fire Marshal Dave Roth, and Ken Kalos, VFD Public Information Officer, coordinated the event, entitled "Family Emergency Preparedness Day." The day was also structured to promote volunteerism within the emergency services in town and for families to realize the importance, but simplicity, of having communication plans in the case of an emergency.



Firefighter Rob Babcock shows an air pack.
Photo by Ken Kalos, VFD



(l-r) Michael Purcaro, Vernon's OEM Director;
Tom Gavaghan, DEMHS Area 3 Coordinator;
and Bill Hackett, DEMHS OEM Director.
Photo by Ken Kalos, VFD

Over the course of the day, several thousand people entered Henry Park for the event, including children and families heading to Horowitz Pool and children from day camp programs. Another draw to the event was a live broadcast by Hot 93.7, a radio station out of Farmington. The live-broadcast was part of the station's regular "Community Wednesdays" program.

"We had the mayor stop by—she's very funny and we love her," said deejay Jenny Boom-Boom, referring to Mayor Ellen Marmar. "This event was very educational and it gave the kids something to do with us."

”It was our first time here, doing Community Wednesday, [but] I’m pretty sure it won’t be the last – we had such a great turnout,” deejay Big Regg said. In addition, national recording artist “Hurricane Chris” stopped by to sign autographs and ambassadors from the Boston Red Sox distributed team promotional items.

Carmen G. Rodriguez, Public Information Officer for FEMA, the agency which was deployed to Connecticut following the April flooding which qualified six of the state’s eight counties for federal assistance, said FEMA attended the event to help the people of Vernon learn how to prepare for emergencies. Rodriguez said families should have three days of supplies available following an emergency situation. That supply kit should include enough water, food and first-aid supplies for everyone in the family. She also noted that FEMA had information available on creating car emergency kits and how to properly evacuate a site.



Vernon Fire Marshal David Roth educates children on fire safety and prevention in the home.
Photo by Ken Kalos, VFD



Vernon OEM Director Purcaro and representatives from SBA and FEMA provide Hot 93.7FM listeners with important emergency preparedness information.
Photo by Ken Kalos, VFD

To make the learning experience fun for children, FEMA distributed coloring books to them that helped illustrate how to prepare for an emergency and what they can do to help their parents in the case of an emergency. “The important thing is for families to be ready,” she said. “It’s about protecting your own family – it’s a family responsibility and we’re here to help.”

Former Vernon resident Hiram Cardona brought his children Savannah, 8, and Adonis, 4, to the event. “We try to keep them aware of

safety,” he said. “Even if they don’t know, we try to keep them aware – safety first,” he said. A close eye is kept on the children, he said, and the children know that if there is an emergency and he or their mother are not around, they should call the police or a trusted adult. He said instilling a small amount of fear in his children also works. “Sometimes it’s good to scare them a little bit,” he said. “It never hurts to put the fear in them – it worked for me as a kid.”



Representatives from FEMA provide children with emergency preparedness educational resources.
Photo by Ken Kalos, VFD

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