

CERTs and ARES Support Active Shooter Training

by JoMarie Falkerson

In July, Santa Cruz County's Community Emergency Response Team (CERT), Amateur Radio Emergency Services (ARES) and Search and Rescue (SAR) volunteers were activated to support the annual Santa Cruz Regional Active Shooter and Casualty Care Response Training event sponsored by the Santa Cruz County Sheriff's department. The volunteers were tasked to monitor the perimeter and parking areas of the access-controlled training site, redirecting unauthorized pedestrian and/or vehicle traffic that may inadvertently enter the area, and reporting/communicating potential suspicious activity or other issues.

The event ran for six days, from July 10 to July 15, at the tri-campus location in Felton of the San Lorenzo Valley Schools. It is a professionally conducted training for law enforcement, fire, and medical first responders who may be called upon to face an active shooter in a crowded environment. The training includes live scenarios with volunteer actors playing the roles of shooters, victims, and panicked bystanders. The organizing of the event was completed over several months. CERT command staff including Planning Chief John Collins, Operations Chief Bill Monroe, and Logistics Deputy JoMarie Faulkerson along with ARES Event Manager Dan Selling, were included in the planning.

This was the first time using the tri-campus location, and it encompassed a much larger footprint of perimeter monitoring. Prior years the event had been at Scotts Valley High School and UCSC. Also different this year were the additional activities on-going during the same time as the event at the campus location. This included preschool operation, campus construction, and a high school all-class reunion.

Radio communications were via MURs and public safety radios. Health and welfare checks for each volunteer on site were completed at least every half hour by a designated radio operator. The Active Shooter event Logistics Coordinator provided additional communications via the public safety radio to the teams. Each team had to acknowledge these communications. This included health and welfare bulletins (i.e., keeping hydrated) and scenario initiation and cessation.

After signing in and receiving a briefing by the shift lead, the perimeter monitor volunteers were paired up when staffing allowed and sent to one of five locations. The 4-5 hour shifts overlapped to allow time for the briefing and transition of volunteers at each of the posts. Sheriff officers in a roving Gator utility vehicle augmented the perimeter monitoring posts.

Most days were in the mid – to high 80s and with an afternoon breeze. Each post had a pop-up, and most were positioned under a canopy of trees. However, the planners did have to evaluate each day as there were issued weather alerts for extreme heat.

There were 434 hours of service by 52 volunteers. Many of the volunteers have dual "citizenship" with both CERT and ARES. And because of this, it is difficult to state the exact hours provided by each of the groups. However, nine CERT teams from all over the county were represented. Ten of the enthusiastic CERT volunteers completed their basic course within the past year. Two just graduated in June and stepped right into volunteering! This included Teresa Locatelli of Soquel, and George Wright of Aptos. One recent CERT basic graduate, Bonnie Willis of Aptos, enjoyed herself so much on her first shift that she signed up for two more shifts. Bonnie also offered and provided an improvement in a directional sign on the spot when there was a lot of reunion traffic coming into the main area of the campus.

Many returning volunteers reported enjoying themselves more at this campus because of the challenges it presented. The SLV campus has greater public use with the offerings of disc golf, running on the track, use of the swimming pool, playing basketball, using the baseball and soccer fields and access to the Fall Creek part of Henry Cowell. This led to many interactions by the volunteers with the public explaining the purpose and length of the campus closure. There was a great sense of purpose of this activation.