



## Partners in Prevention

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### Kevin Smith, Salvation Army Director of Emergency Disaster Services, Florida Division

*April showers brings **National Volunteer Month**, a time for showering praise on all our volunteers whose efforts help to bring the FLASH mission to life. In honor of the occasion, we want to shine the spotlight on a longtime FLASH volunteer who has consistently gone above and beyond the call of duty. With heavy demands on his time as Director of Emergency Disaster Services for the Salvation Army Florida Division, Kevin Smith has found the time and energy to get involved with FLASH in significant ways since 1998.*

**FLASH:** Thank you for taking the time to talk with us Kevin and what you have brought to the safety, property protection, and resiliency disasters table in the last two decades. Please tell our readers how you got involved with FLASH.

**KEVIN SMITH:** In 1998, I was invited to serve on the FLASH Board of Directors. I was working in emergency management with the Salvation Army, and FLASH was looking to engage a wider array of non-governmental partners. At my first board meeting, we talked about distributing "[FLASH Cards](#)" to individuals and families. That got me hooked. Ever since then, the Salvation Army has been a committed partner of FLASH and helped to spread the importance of disaster mitigation and preparedness. We advocate for community and building resilience based on government policies and legislation, and we seek to engage citizens in decision-making that will protect homes and prepare families.

**FLASH:** How did you get interested in disaster safety?

**KEVIN SMITH:** I have a desire to help people. The Salvation Army's disaster response mission is simple: "Serve others at their greatest time of need." There will always be those who need disaster assistance. Communities are often overwhelmed when disasters occur, primarily because people did not take the steps necessary to prepare themselves and their families. I believe the more people listen to the key messages of FLASH, the more resilient our communities will become. With more people taking greater personal responsibility, the Salvation Army will be better able to focus on those who truly do not have the means to prepare for disasters. That is why I am committed to supporting the efforts of FLASH as together we build a more resilient nation.

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**FLASH:** As an organization dedicated to saving lives and property before a disaster strikes, we rely on volunteers to spread that message. Since it is National Volunteer Month, what are some specific ways you might encourage others to get involved?

**KEVIN SMITH:** There is no doubt our communities come together in times of disaster. Across the nation, you can see the best in people as neighbor supports neighbor, each helping the other to recover from disasters. When people volunteer their time to help others, it is the key to community recovery. It motivates others and brings hope to those most affected. I think one of the best ways to support disaster recovery is to take time to know your neighbor. That is the first step. You also might want to consider volunteering for a local organization dedicated to emergency management or disaster preparedness. There are so many opportunities out there to make a difference.

**FLASH:** What do you see as the future of resilient building? What do you think is moving the cause of resilience forward?

**KEVIN SMITH:** With the amount of work FLASH has done to advocate for stronger building codes, and code acceptance, I believe FLASH has paved an excellent path into the future. Our strategy moving forward has to center on advocacy and information sharing to implement existing codes. We also need to find ways to help fund the efforts of those who seek to adhere to codes.

**FLASH:** Tell us about a specific project you are working on in the field of resilience?

**KEVIN SMITH:** The Salvation Army is heavily involved with disaster response training as well as personal and family preparedness as a means to accomplish local resiliency. Our efforts to teach Medic First Aid/CPR free of charge, and to teach congregations how to prepare houses of worship for disaster response, are two important ways we prepare people to bounce back. We also train people through our preparedness courses. We help people to know local codes so they can ensure their houses are up-to-date and meeting those codes. We also teach them innovative ways to protect their property. The more we can protect those who have the financial means to stay up-to-date in advance of a disaster, the more we can effectively assist those of lesser means in times of crisis.

**FLASH:** That's an important distinction. Do you have any other words of wisdom you would like to share?

**KEVIN SMITH:** I believe our elected officials must engage in a difficult dialogue that begins, "I know we can build it here . . . *but should we* build it here?" If our desire to build our tax base exceeds our ability to protect those that live in our communities, then that is a recipe for disaster. Population growth and code development must be carefully considered if we are to successfully build community resilience. I truly believe this is the heart of moving forward together in the disaster safety movement.

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