

Neighbor Helping Neighbor

By Dr. Kenneth S. Cheng

Studies show that over 90% of aid provided during a major disaster comes not from public agencies but from friends and neighbors. The concept of “Neighbor Helping Neighbor” is the foundational element of the Nellie Gail Emergency Preparedness Committee. “Neighbor Helping Neighbor” is accomplished by having the following two elements in place: 1) a group of volunteers (Block Captains, Area Coordinators and Emergency Preparedness Committee members) to assist our community in the event of a major disaster, and 2) residents within the community who have taken the necessary steps to prepare themselves and their families. This month, we will focus on the specifics of how Block Captains and Area Coordinators will be an important link in the “Neighbor Helping Neighbor” network.

By definition, a disaster is an event that will overwhelm the existing resources available to aid disaster victims and that a call to 9-1-1, even if it gets through the jammed phone lines, will likely result in no assistance for days or weeks. The anticipated lack of outside help compels all of us to prepare ourselves and, if possible, to be ready to assist others within our community. Studies from major disasters show that most aid to disaster victims comes from neighbors and others within the community, and not from disaster workers or relief organizations. Members of your Nellie Gail Emergency Preparedness Committee are committed to the belief that Neighbor Helping Neighbor is how our community will survive a large scale disaster. Fortunately, committee members include individuals who are proficient with Ham radio communications, Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) trained, Search and Rescue trained, disaster medicine trained, and individuals who have already taken steps to prepare and have the skills and knowledge to assist. They have volunteered hundreds of hours of their time to helping our community be better prepared through:

- Educating residents on emergency preparedness,
- Being a resource for disaster preparedness,
- Developing an emergency communication system within Nellie Gail and to outside entities even when all utilities are non-functional, and
- Being capable of providing limited first aid during a regional disaster.

The Block Captain and Area Coordinators will be your direct link to all of these and other resources.

BLOCK CAPTAINS

Block Captains are residents of Nellie Gail who live on your block or are within a short walking distance to you. He or she will “oversee” approximately 12 - 20 households and will be your link to the Emergency Preparedness Committee Command Center. The role of the Block Captain is to make sure his or her 12 - 20 households are safe and are not in need of urgent assistance. He or she will be trained on radio communications to the Area Coordinators and/or Command Center, and will also have additional training on how to turn off utilities, light search and rescue, and basic first aid. The Block

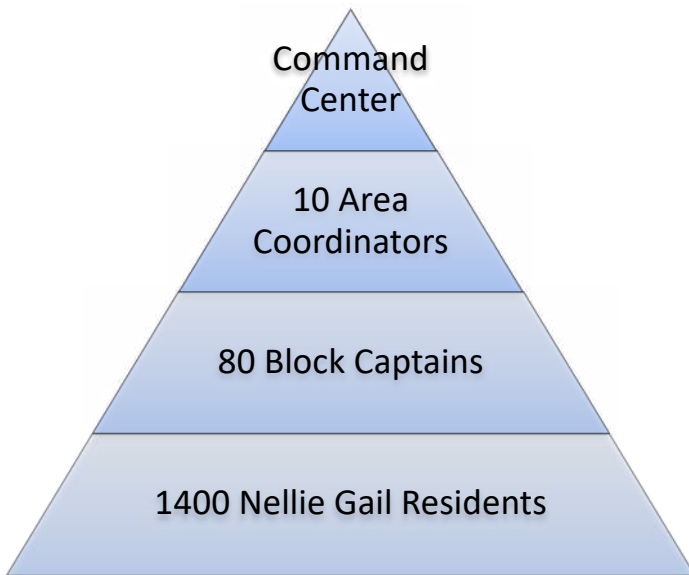
Captain is your local resource expert; your first line of defense when help is needed. If the Block Captain determines that one of their residents are in need of assistance, the Block Captain can either provide the assistance, seek others within his or her block to assist, or can contact the Area Coordinator (see below) for assistance. As an example, if a resident smells gas in the house and doesn't know what to do, her Block Captain, in the process of checking on his neighbors, helps this resident by turning off the gas main.

AREA COORDINATORS

Area Coordinators are residents of Nellie Gail who, like the Block Captains, have skills and training to assist residents, but also have advanced capabilities of communications through Ham radios. These individuals will oversee 8-10 Block Captains and will be in direct contact with the Nellie Gail Command Center through their Ham radios. They will also be a resource to their Block Captains who are in need of assistance as the Area Coordinator may be able to enlist the aid of his or her remaining 7-9 other Block Captains. As an example, Block Captain "1" informs his Area Coordinator that he has a resident who has severely injured his ankle. The Area Coordinator broadcasts this information to his 9 other Block Captains and hears back from two: Block Captain "3" has a resident who is a physician and Block Captain "7" has a resident who has some unused crutches. The Area Coordinator now coordinates this help with all three Block Captains. Using this same example one step further, had the Area Coordinator not heard back from any of his Block Captains, then the Area Coordinator would then contact the Command Center and the Command Center could broadcast the request for help to other Area Coordinators.

COMMAND CENTER

During a disaster, the Command Center (located at the Nellie Gail Clubhouse) will be staffed by members of the Nellie Gail Emergency Preparedness Committee. From the Command Center, we will be able to coordinate many of the needs of the residents through the Block Captains and Area Coordinators. In addition, the Command Center will have communication access to the Emergency Operations Center for Orange County and other aid resources via Ham radio. The Command Center will also have a limited amount of first aid supplies, water, and electrical generator capabilities. Please note: The Command Center DOES NOT have the capabilities of being your "earthquake kit" during a disaster. It will **not** be providing all the food, water, and shelter needs of this community. We do, however, have the resources to provide you with all the information necessary to prepare you and your family for a disaster (i.e. pre-disaster planning.)



Just within the Nellie Gail community, the resources we have are enormous. The skills sets in our community include a variety of medical, dental, and veterinary doctors and nurses, psychologists, structural engineers and construction experts, fire and law enforcement personnel, search and rescue experts just to name a few. With proper coordination, we can utilize these resources within our Nellie Gail community through the Neighbor Helping Neighbor concept in conjunction with our system of Block Captains, Area Coordinators and the Command Center.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

First and foremost, spend a half-day and assemble your own earthquake kit. A step-by-step “how to” was published in the September 2020 issue of the *Pony Express*. Even better, gather several of your neighbors and assemble your kits together. The Emergency Preparedness Committee also encourages you to virtually attend our monthly Zoom webinars on the different aspects of family preparedness. Topics will include building your earthquake kit, how to prepare at work, preserving water, food storage, shelter and hygiene during a disaster, preparing a grab-and-go bag, security, how to make your home less fire-prone, basics on communications and technology during a disaster, etc. This is an opportunity to learn and get your questions answered from experts.

Secondly, consider being a Block Captain. The role of the Block Captain is of great importance and during a disaster, a necessary link between residents and the Command Center. We are seeking volunteers for the position of Block Captain. The requirements are:

- Commit to assembling your earthquake kit
- Volunteer 1 (one) hour every 3 to 6 months
- Willingness to help your immediate neighbors, if needed.

No skills are necessary as you will be provided the following:

- Basic survival skills through “Block Captain” educational classes and events
- Basic first aid (and CPR, optional)
- Radio communication skills for communicating with others in the community
- Basic tools and supply list to make your survival and your role as a Block Captain easier

As you can see, the time commitment is minimal but the importance is great.

To learn more about being a Block Captain or Area Coordinator, or to get more information on Nellie Gail’s Emergency Preparedness Committee, please contact this author at emergencypreparedness@nelliegailranch.org.

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LEARN HOW TO PREPARE FOR AN EMERGENCY

The Nellie Gail Emergency Preparedness Committee is holding monthly webinars on different aspects of how to prepare for the next emergency. Some of the many topics will include:

- How to build an earthquake kit
- How to make sure you have enough of the most important part of your earthquake kit: water.
- When is it appropriate to turn of the gas and water off? How do you do it?
- Where’s my bathroom during a disaster?
- What’s the best food for storage?

Please keep an eye out for announcements on the time and date. You can also email the committee at emergencypreparedness@nelliegailranch.org for more information.