

'Mr. Earthquake Preparedness' to get his just due

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By Cheryl Walker
The News

Leisure World wouldn't have an earthquake preparedness program that the Orange County Fire Department says outshines any Orange County city's if it wasn't for the efforts of one man: Joe Samet.

The man whom Milt Adamson, chairman of the Golden Rain Earthquake and Disaster Preparedness Task Force, calls "Mr. Earthquake Preparedness" provided the spark that got the program started and has continued to provide the energy to keep it going.

Samet, who will be honored on Wednesday, Oct. 14 by the Historical Society, as Leisure Worlder of the Month, says in his pre-retirement days there wasn't time

for involvement with community projects. He was too busy running his own business, as a baked goods distributor in Queens, N.Y.



Don Leach/The News

Joe Samet spends a lot of time at the local fire station getting advice on how to prepare Leisure World residents for 'the big one.'

Before becoming the main spring of Leisure World's task force, the extent of his community involvement were brief terms as president

of Cub and Boy Scout Troops and of the Jewish Fellowship of Hemlock Farms. But an Orange County Register article in 1989 changed all that.

In the piece, a spokesperson for the fire department was quoted as saying that in the event of an earthquake, it might take 72 hours to respond to emergency calls and people should be prepared to take care of themselves for that long.

Samet describes what happened next. "That night I had a nightmare and all I could see was a little old lady stuck on the ground in her manor with a grandfather's clock on top of her and for three days she wouldn't be rescued and nobody was there to help her.

"The very same thing happened the next night. The next day I sat down and did something I have never done before: I wrote a letter to the G.R.F. (Golden Rain Foundation) board and asked what they were doing about earthquake preparedness."

LEISURE WORLDER CEREMONY

Who: Joe Samet
When: Wednesday, Oct. 14
Where: Clubhouse 6
Time: 10 a.m.
Sponsor: Leisure World Historical Society

Samet says he got a letter back telling him, in brief, to "go do it." And that he did, working closely with the three task force chairpersons, Ed Linzer, Peggy Kermer, now Golden Rain president, and Adamson.

"Few people have a gift of total accomplishment in an endeavor that Joe Samet has given the community in preparing us for emergency and disaster," says Adamson.

Don Chaney, staff coordinator, says he believes the task force

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would still be struggling "if it were not for the dedication and perseverance of Joe Samet."

Samet's primary talent is his organizational ability.

His first effort was to make sure every resident of the community had an opportunity (whether they took advantage of it or not) to learn how to prepare their manors, neighborhoods and communities for a disaster.

Then he set up a neighborhood watch network of area coordinators and gate captains to join the 22,000 residents into a cohesive whole.

He further coordinated two

ambitious earthquake fairs in the community with the latest emergency preparedness foodstuffs, supplies and information.

His most recent innovations are a 24-hour hotline (951-2237) to make the task force even more accessible and the hosting of first aid and cardio-pulmonary resuscitation courses taught by fire department personnel, to give residents the practical tools to enable them to help the injured and save lives if medical help is unavailable.

Perhaps Samet's greatest gift is his unflappability and unwillingness to rest with the accomplishments of the past.

"The American Red Cross and the (Orange County) Sheriff's De-

partment told us in the beginning organizing a place as large as Leisure World couldn't be done. But we broke up the job in sections and our progress has been excellent," says Samet.

But he says he hasn't stopped worrying "about all the people, particularly the single ladies, . . . many of whom are not physically capable of helping themselves in an emergency."

Samet says he hopes the recent hurricanes in Florida and Hawaii have convinced residents not to take lightly what Mother Nature can do.

"I'd like residents to be able to take care of themselves for six days not just three."

"When we started the program

many people acted like they couldn't care less about themselves and their neighbors.

"Now, I think the recent hurricanes have shown people the National Guard is inept, F.E.M.A. (Federal Emergency Management Agency) is full of politics and it takes four to five days to get military help and we've got to be prepared on our own."

Samet says his wish list for his organization would be more trauma kits for task force nurses and doctors and at least 3,500 committed volunteers to make sure, in case The Big One hits "everybody's door gets knocked on and no one's cry for help goes unheard."

It's a tall order, Samet admits, but "little by little, we're getting there."