

Red Cross: Join Disaster Relief Effort

By PAULA KATINAS

If another Hurricane Katrina hits, will you be ready?

That was the question representatives of the American Red Cross asked residents at the Dyker Heights Civic Association meeting on June 9.

Brooklyn is not immune to natural disasters, according to Olivier Szlos, senior director of community development for the American Red Cross of Greater New York.

Bay Ridge was hit by a tornado in August 2007, he noted.

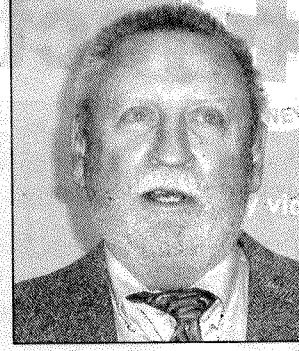
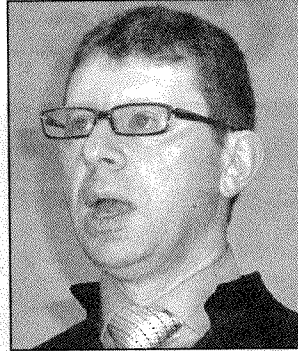
Denise Bloise, director of the Red Cross' Staten Island and Brooklyn office, distributed information brochures containing advice on how to "Be Ready for an Emergency."

Each resident should prepare a disaster supplies kit and place such items as canned foods, can openers, a change of clothing, flashlights, and vital documents such as wills, Social Security cards, and financial records inside.

Emergency readiness should also include making a plan with family members on where to meet if an emergency occurs and practicing evacuating the house, the Red Cross recommends.

Residents should also be informed by knowing what types of disasters can occur, officials said.

The Red Cross responds to 3,000



Speaking about disaster relief at the recent meeting of the Dyker Heights Civic Association were, left to right, Denise Bloise, director of the Staten Island and Brooklyn office of the Red Cross; Olivier Szlos, a senior director of the American Red Cross of Greater New York; and Fred Leahy, who has been a Red Cross volunteer for many years.

emergencies a year in New York City, Szlos said. That's about eight to 10 a day, he noted.

"A third of all the incidents we respond to are in Brooklyn," Szlos said.

The Greater New York chapter is the largest Red Cross chapter in the country.

The disaster relief provided by the Red Cross includes finding victims a place to stay if their homes have been destroyed, and helping residents obtain food, clothing, and medication, officials said.

The Red Cross also assists residents with paperwork when the victims are seeking government aid.

Victims are often left shocked and con-

fused after an emergency, officials said.

"Disasters happen at 2 a.m. when no one is around to help," Szlos told civic association members at the meeting, which took place at St. Philip's Episcopal Church Hall at 1072 80th St.

The Red Cross was on hand to help victims after the tornado hit Bay Ridge on Aug. 8, 2007, officials said.

The tornado tore the roofs off several homes on 68th and 69th Streets, officials said.

The purpose of the Red Cross's visit to the Dyker Heights Civic Association was to re-introduce residents to the agency and to seek volunteers to join,

Bloise said.

"We're trying to reach out to all residents in all communities," she said.

The Red Cross trains residents in such skills as CPR, according to Szlos, who urged civic association members to sign up.

"Don't wait for a disaster to happen. Get trained now. The clock is ticking. Disasters are happening," he said.

Fred Leahy, 74, is a Red Cross volunteer who helped victims in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

"There's nothing greater than the feeling you get when someone comes up to you and thanks you for helping them," he said.

His group serves as a liaison between victims and government agencies such as FEMA, he said.

"The volunteers are like a family," said Leahy, who serves the Red Cross four days a week.

A person doesn't have to be trained in CPR to make a valuable contribution to the Red Cross effort, Bloise said.

Even answering phones is enough, she said.

"We need all kinds of volunteers," she said.

The Red Cross screens potential volunteers and tries to match the person's skills with a job, she said.

For more information, call the Red Cross at 1-877-REDCROSS.