

Storm tested Hamptonburgh's new emergency volunteers

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Hamptonburgh Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) members prepare to distribute dry ice and bottled water during the recent snowstorm and resultant power outages.

Photo provided

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HAMPTONBURGH — The Hamptonburgh Community Emergency Response Team (CERT), a group of volunteers trained in basic emergency response skills, were called into action Feb. 25 as a result of the region's worst snowstorm.

When the need arose to gather volunteers for duty, they contacted one another by telephone in a preplanned calling chain. Coincidentally, the team had just completed a test of their telephone tree communication plan.

"We kept it simple and it worked," CERT coordinator Richard Rasmussen said.

Reacting to the likelihood of extended power outages, Rasmussen quickly arranged for the distribution of dry ice and bottled water to the community.

The Hamptonburgh CERT operated the distribution center for three days handing out dry ice and bottled water, logging 226 person hours. Local radio stations announced the distribution. Team members gave out about 11,000 pounds of dry ice and 1,600 bottles of water to the local community as well as to residents from extended areas of Orange and Sullivan counties.

"My team trains for exactly this type of event and they did an outstanding job," Rasmussen said.

Hamptonburgh Supervisor Bob Jankowski and the Town Board applauded the team at a recent Town Board meeting for their community service and responsiveness.

The Hamptonburgh CERT thanked Central Hudson Gas & Electric Corp. for supplying dry ice and bottled

water to provide to residents and the Campbell Hall Fire Department for use of the firehouse as CERT's distribution site.

The CERT Program encourages members to assist others in their neighborhood or workplace following an event and to take an active role in preparing their community. The first wave of volunteers graduated less than three months ago. The program was expanded recently to include a "basic level" program to encourage community involvement and to better accommodate the schedules of interested volunteers.

The Hamptonburgh CERT is the first organized in Orange County, receiving approval from the State Emergency Management Office in early 2009. It is part of a nationwide organization of about 3,300 CERT with over 200,000 members in the United States.

To learn more about the Hamptonburgh CERT and volunteering for the team, visit <http://townofhamptonburgh.org> or contact Rasmussen at 692-2766 or firstresponse@hvc.rr.com.

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