

## Bernie Durgin ... A Hometown Hero

Written by Karen V. Contino

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Ocoee resident Bernie Durgin, a volunteer with the American Red Cross Mid-Florida Region since 2006

If anyone needs him, Bernie Durgin is there. A volunteer w

“That’s what the Red Cross responds to, disasters that don’t always make the news,” said Bernie, a Red

For his day job, Bernie has served as operations manager at St. Pauls Presbyterian Church in Gotha for

Bernie was first attracted to the Red Cross in 1998 while volunteering with a West Orange County nonpr

“The Red Cross is absolutely an organization that truly is there to help people in need,” he said. “There i

In 2006, Bernie saw an ad in a newspaper about an open American Red Cross Mid-Florida Region volun

“It was to introduce the mission of the Red Cross to the attendees,” he said. “The rest is history.”

Recently, Bernie assisted in what may have been the largest fire response Central Floridians have seen

“Unfortunately, many lost practically everything they own,” said Laureen Martinez, chief public relations o

In total, 29 Red Cross volunteers and staff responded and served 327 displaced hotel residents — 232 a

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“We knew going in that it was going to be a big response,” Bernie said. “I was driving down [State Road]

Bernie worked into the next morning, providing victims with food, water and compassion and directing ev

“We assess their immediate needs, and we offer them the most important basics — a place to stay, a ro

Bernie added that the emotional support the Red Cross provides is as important as meeting the victims’

“Our goal is to respond to a client within two hours of a phone call,” he said. “Typically we can do it withi

Raised in south New Hampshire as the youngest of three, Bernie learned the importance of community i

“I grew up in a small town, a university town, in New England,” he said. “My father served as a town cou

And according to Laureen, this sense of community makes Bernie an exceptional volunteer.

“Volunteers like Bernie, who are committed to helping clients, are the backbone of the American Red C

Fellow Red Cross volunteer Dan Faenza of Hunter’s Creek could not agree more.



The Vacation Lodge in Kissimmee burns down, leaving hundreds of residents homeless and without any

“He’s outstanding,” Dan said. “He’s my go-to guy. If I have any questions, whether it’s 2 in the morning o

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