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MAKING A DIFFERENCE

## Ready for the worst, with a plan to **COPE** Oakmont resident has organized community to prepare for any disaster



Sue Hattendorf, who organized her Oakmont community to be ready for emergencies, keeps supplies in the trunk of her car. JEFF KAN LEE / The Press Democrat

By RAQUEL MARIA DILLON  
THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

**Sue Hattendorf** learned everything she needed to know about emergency preparedness in the Northridge earthquake in Southern California.

"Remember those gas fires on TV?" said Hattendorf, 73. "That was my back yard. Those apartment houses that collapsed? That was four blocks away."

Hattendorf was a block captain for her neighborhood watch group in Recita, so when the 6.7-magnitude quake hit in January 1994 and the power went out, her house became a gathering place. Families slept in their cars and held a block party by the light of a bonfire.

Now she's playing a similar role in the Oakmont retirement community by heading up an organization called **COPE**, or **Citizens Organized to Prepare for Emergencies**.

Together with her partner, Al Thomas, 74, **Hattendorf has signed up over 1,800 households** and organized them into 180 neighborhood disaster-response teams.

Hattendorf's sensible advice and organizational skills have rejuvenated Santa Rosa's neighborhood emergency preparedness program and provided a model for communities around the North Coast. "We've been told by of Northern California," she said.

the Fire Department that we're the best prepared in all  
Hattendorf is full of safety tips and advice:

Keep a pair of shoes and old eyeglasses in your car. Every time canned tuna is on your grocery list, buy two and put one in the emergency kit. But she said the most important piece of advice is this: "During an emergency, your neighbors are your closest family. Learn what you need to about them without impinging on people's privacy."

She tells newly recruited team leaders to get to know their neighbors: Who has pets? Who needs extra help? Where are all the gas shutoff valves?

Each team represents a block or about a dozen households so elderly Oakmont residents don't have to walk far to meet their neighbors in case of an emergency.

Hattendorf documents everything with spreadsheets and diagrams and simple instructions for team organizers, using her experience from her careers as a research mathematician, a computer programmer and a manager.

Thomas, who is chairman of the Oakmont Emergency Preparedness Committee, said Hattendorf is so calm and collected that during the earthquake located near Kenwood recently, she didn't even jump. "We were watching 'Raymond,' and there was this big boom. Thomas said Hattendorf eyed the chandelier that swayed above the dining room table and guessed that it was a 4.6-magnitude quake. It actually registered 4.4.

Thomas said he worries more about wildfires. "When Annadel (State Park) burns, Oakmont is going to burn too," and Highway 12 won't be a reliable escape route, he said. "The best place to be will be the golf course. You can live there for days." Now neighbors turn to Hattendorf and Thomas for counsel and information.

The Oakmont COPE teams stash basic first-aid supplies in strategic locations and collect the names of people who might be able to help in an emergency, including retired doctors and nurses, ministers, even households that have chain saws. City officials borrowed liberally from her step-by-step advice procedures to write a new booklet for other neighborhoods to use. "I keep asking them when I'm going to get paid," Hattendorf joked.

Santa Rosa General Services Administrator Ed Buonaccorsi praised her energy and commitment. "She took the program and ran with it. There's a domino effect that her passion and energy is doing for the community."

Hattendorf said the Northridge quake taught her that disasters "cause damage but you can cope. If you do things in a sensible manner, you can put things back together again."

Santa Rosa recently appointed a new emergency preparedness coordinator, Paul Hess, who is working with about a dozen neighborhoods to set up COPE teams.

"Sue and Al are balls of energy, and great examples of how community volunteers can take an idea and roll with it."

**Santa Rosa residents who are interested in learning more and organizing a COPE program in their own neighborhood can contact the COPE Program at 543-3711 or [cope@srcity.org](mailto:cope@srcity.org)**



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**This information can also be accessed via the internet at: [cope.srcity.org](http://cope.srcity.org)**