

Classes help coordinate efforts after disasters

By CHRISTINE HAWES CORRESPONDENT

Published: Saturday, April 5, 2008 at 2:10 p.m.

Last Modified: Saturday, April 5, 2008 at 2:10 p.m.

Curt Hencye has been involved in enough natural disaster efforts to know what often happens.

"A hundred people show up with rakes and water," he said. "Nobody shows up with food or clothes. Then you get to the point where you need to do drywall, and people are still showing up with chainsaws."

He and his church, Calvary Chapel of Sarasota, are leading a local effort to help faith-based volunteers be more efficient in their disaster response. Relief Ministries of Calvary Chapel will lead disaster relief training camps today and April 12. Through ongoing outreach, Relief Ministries hopes to organize other area churches into an effective network ready to respond within hours.

"We're looking for anybody in our community that either has a desire to be involved in this kind of work, or is already involved," Hencye said. "You may have no experience; you may have been doing it for years. What we want to see is people coming together."

Relief Ministries began in 2004, after Hencye and a group of Calvary Chapel members helped with relief efforts in Charlotte County following Hurricane Charley. That experience led Hencye to remain involved in disaster relief, and another church member to donate a trailer to the effort.

Hencye devoted his full-time efforts to Relief Ministries after becoming self-employed about two years ago. Within the past year, he has helped with disaster relief in Florida's Lady Lake area, near Nashville, Tenn., and in Peru.

The training camp Hencye will lead today and April 12 covers key tracks of disaster relief, such as mass feeding, medical relief, distribution, communication and counseling. Hencye brings not only his personal experience, but the training he received at a disaster relief camp in North Carolina.

Hencye works in partnership with numerous other organizations, several of them nationwide, that are also working to better organize faith-based organizations for disaster relief. They include the Network of Hope, based in Manatee County; the Friendship Volunteer Center of Sarasota's Friendship Center, which coordinates more than 5,000

volunteers of all ages to help almost 500 organizations annually; Mercy Chefs Emergency Food Services of Virginia; God's Pit Crew, another Virginia-based organization that has responded to 33 major disasters in 11 states since its founding in 1999; the Southern Baptist Convention Disaster Relief, which has 30,000 volunteers nationwide; and the Tennessee-based Operation Compassion.

Hencye emphasizes that all interested people are welcome, even if they are not involved in a church. He also said he feels disaster relief is an "obligation of Christians."

"When Jesus walked on the earth, he physically reached out and touched people," Hencye said. "He met their needs. He took care of them, from the first miracle of the wine at the wedding to feeding crowds of people. He always took care of their human needs, and he did it by being part of their lives.

"Now that he's gone, as Christians it's our responsibility. And this is a practical way that we can do this."