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Omar Lopez, Coastal Bend - Texas Chapter American Red Cross

Since its founding in 1881, the American Red Cross has been providing services to disaster victims throughout the world. We have seen their presence following earthquakes and tornados, floods and fires. Seemingly, always on the scene, the American Red Cross prides itself on its impartiality, helping anyone who needs help, regardless of color, language, or socioeconomic background. According to its website, www.redcross.org, the American Red Cross helps victims of over 70,000 disasters each year. Using a network of 700 local chapters and many volunteers and staff, the Red Cross goes to work providing necessities to those who have lost their homes, their possessions, or even their loved ones.

In April, I reported on a town hall meeting held in Port Aransas, Texas, where Texas State Representative Juan Garcia spoke about a number of issues of interest to residents of the Texas Coastal Bend. Just for information, the "Coastal Bend" includes the section of Texas that runs along the coastline of Texas from Palacios to Corpus Christi and inland from Kenedy south to Kingsville.

As part of Representative Garcia's agenda that night, he introduced Mr. Omar Lopez, Director of Development and Communication for the Coastal Bend Chapter of the American Red Cross. He spoke to the town hall meeting participants about the mission of the American Red Cross and the work of the Coastal Bend - Texas Chapter. Mr. Lopez took time to discuss his responsibilities with the Coastal Bend Chapter, including the Chapter's



Omar Lopez

*fund raising efforts. We also spoke about volunteerism and how he came to be involved in this volunteer-oriented organization that for so long has been a fixture in our lives. We met in the Coastal Bend – Texas offices in Corpus Christi, Texas. **rhl.***

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ROBERT LEOS: *What is your primary role with Coastal Bend Chapter?*

OMAR LOPEZ: My role is Director of Development and Communications. I do two things: fund-raising and communications. I am only the second person to do both jobs. For many years, they had a person for fund raising and a person for public relations. They really go hand-in-hand, however, so they hired one person to do both jobs. We do a lot of third party fund raising. I handle everything related to development—grants, grant writing, foundation requests. We had a great year. This year we won the Charity League Grant. Every single dollar that they raised went to us this year. This is the first year we won. This capital grant will help us fix our wiring, the lights, and it will provide us with new furniture. It is also going to buy us two new vehicles.

ROBERT LEOS: *What are some of your responsibilities on the communications side of your job?*

OMAR LOPEZ: The communication side of my job is to tell the Red Cross story, not to tell people what is happening in a disaster. When people ask for help from the Red Cross, we do not report their names. We keep all of that private. We *will* say that we have helped a family of five and offered them resources, but we never say who they are or how much money we have spent on them.

ROBERT LEOS: *I understand from reading about the Red Cross that donations are used locally, unlike other charitable organizations that have sizeable administrative expenditures.*

OMAR LOPEZ: One thing that I have learned about fund raising in South

Quick Facts

©Coastal Bend-Texas Chapter

- Chartered on September 16, 1916, the local Red Cross chapter is celebrating its 90th year of providing services to residents of the Coastal Bend.
- The chapter currently assists over 50 communities in 12 counties throughout the Coastal Bend (Aransas, Bee, Brooks, Duval, Jim Hogg, Jim Wells, Kenedy, Kleberg, Live Oak, Nueces, Refugio, San Patricio). Core services are disaster relief and preparedness, Community Training and Safety, and military communications.
- The chapter is headquartered in Corpus Christi and has regional offices in Alice and Aransas Pass. Services are provided 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.
- Locally governed by a 34-member board of directors responsible for setting priorities, raising money and providing sound financial management.
- The chapter receives no government appropriation to provide its services; we rely on support from the United Way and from local donors. Approximately 40% of our revenue is from the United Way; 60 cents of every dollar we spend comes from local families, neighbors, businesses and foundations.
- Chapter budget for FY07 (July 1, 2006 - June 30, 2007) is \$865,000.
- Audited every year by a local CPA firm - strong history of no material findings. Accountable to the national Red Cross for 47 performance standards. Last audit indicated over 80 cents of every dollar donated goes directly to programs and services.
- Workforce of about 400 people - 98% of whom are volunteers. 12 Paid staff.
- Assist over 550 people every year in single-family disasters, usually a fire. On average, we respond to a residential fire every 72 hours. Provide emergency shelter, food, clothing, and other emergency needs.
- Train over 15,000 people every year in lifesaving skills.
- Assist over 800 local military families with emergency communication.
- Provide disaster preparedness materials to over 35,000 people annually.
- Major fundraising events - Red Cross Bash (March), Annual Meeting (June).
- In October 2005, the chapter was honored by the Westside Business Association as the Nonprofit Organization of the Year. In March 2006, the chapter was recognized by the national Red Cross with a Star Award for its performance.

The current Board Chair is Pam Taylor.

Quentin Masters serves as the Executive Director.

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Texas is if you donate to the local chapter of the Red Cross, it is going to stay here. People may think that if they give \$20, some of it will go to the national organization. We tell you exactly what we are going to do with the money. When you donate to the Coastal Bend - Texas Chapter, it stays here. Even if there is a natural disaster going on at the national level, they see that we use the money here. When people donate, they can be assured that their money will be used. We are not a federal agency so we do not receive federal funding. We are sanctioned by Congress but all the money we receive comes from United Way and private donations.

ROBERT LEOS: *Have you always been interested in a service-oriented career? How did you come about joining the American Red Cross?*

OMAR LOPEZ: I have enjoyed volunteering for years, and I enjoyed doing it with one of my previous employers. About two years ago, I participated in a program called Leadership Corpus Christi. It was a great experience. I enjoyed being involved in the community, but once the program was over, I found myself asking if I was making a difference. What I knew was there had to be a job that married my skill set with my passion for community building. The woman who had this job before me moved on to another opportunity. About six weeks later, I saw her and told her that I was interested in the job. She encouraged me to apply, I took a chance, and it all worked out. I really enjoy it here. The job fuses my skills with my experiences and my passion for community building. It gives me many opportunities to represent the Red Cross in many different ways.

I like the culture of the Red Cross and the seven fundamental principles that we live by: humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary service, unity, and universality. That is really the way I want to live my life.

When I came to the Red Cross, *impartiality* was something that really stuck with me. If there is a disaster, we are going to help you regardless of who you are, what you do, or whether you are from this country. That is really important to me. It follows me in whatever I do. That is what I like about the organization. If you need help, we are going to help you.

An average of 91 cents of every dollar the Red Cross spends is invested in humanitarian services and programs. The Red Cross is not a government agency; it relies on donations of time, money, and blood to do its work.

-American Red Cross-



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Publisher's Note: I met Omar Lopez at the town hall meeting in Port Aransas, Texas, organized by State Representative Juan Garcia. At the meeting, I learned about the **211** telephone number that citizens can call for information or assistance. Mr. Lopez stressed the importance of being prepared in times of disaster. "Make a kit, make a plan, and stay informed." The "kit" consists of document protection—taking care of important documents such as birth certificates, insurance papers and deeds. The "plan" includes discussions with family and friends and steps that will be taken in the event of a disaster. "Staying informed" means exactly that. Listen to the radio, watch television if possible, and learn as much as you can about the situation.

The Red Cross provides many other services in addition to assistance during disasters. For example, the Red Cross provides outreach services in the community, training for lifesaving, and services for military personnel in times of family emergency. Please visit the following websites for much more information on the American Red Cross, including how you can join the thousands of volunteers that dedicate their efforts to helping people in need.

www.cbtreddcross.org.

This is the website for the Coastal Bend-Texas Chapter.

www.redcross.org.

This is the website for the American Red Cross.

Fundamental Principles of the American Red Cross

**Humanity, Impartiality, Neutrality, Independence,
Voluntary Services, Unity, Universality.**



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