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Red Cross Connections

Manitoba Region | Special Flood 2009 Edition

Second worst flood in a century



photo: Ruth Bonneville

This spring's Red River Flood was the second worst flood in 150 years according to the Province of Manitoba. The sheer size of the flood was enormous, covering 1,700 square kilometers (an area the size of Prince Edward Island). In sections of the river, such as Morris, the Red was almost 17 kilometres wide. Dozens of communities were affected and hundreds of people were forced from their homes. While most have returned home, many people continue to struggle with getting life back to normal following a grueling clean-up. The Canadian Red Cross, along with a number of government and disaster related agencies, answered the call for help when Manitobans needed it most.

Reception centre opens in Winnipeg; Red Cross provides registration & inquiry



A reception centre opened at Century Arena in Winnipeg mid-April and closed at the beginning of May 2009.

By mid April, the rapidly rising Red River started to threaten communities in southern Manitoba. As a result, the City of Winnipeg opened up a reception centre in the Century Arena and it remained open until May 3. People who were forced from their homes due to flooding were supported by government and non-profit disaster relief agencies, including the Red Cross. Our volunteers provided registration and inquiry. The process allows Red Cross to register the personal information of evacuees.

"We appreciate and treasure the partnerships which have been formed here in Manitoba in the last number of years. The Red Cross continues to demonstrate its leadership as one of Manitoba's 'Partners in Disaster' in working in a coordinated effort with the provincial and local governments to meet unmet recovery needs of individuals and communities."

Ron Fortier - Family Services and Housing - Manitoba Government

When family and/or friends contact Red Cross, we are able to confirm the status of the people they are searching for following an evacuation – provided evacuees have registered with us. At the reception centre, Red Cross volunteers registered 280 families or 750 individuals. During the registration process, our volunteers were joined by staff from Emergency Social Services who provided emotional support, guidance and access to additional resources. Evacuees at the reception centre also had access to emergency accommodations and evacuation allowances provided by Family Services and Housing.

Corporations donate money, resources and staff to help with the flood fight



The Red Cross distributed over 500 clean-up kits donated by Rona.

Canada's corporate community donated funds, resources and, in some cases, staff to support the Red Cross flood recovery effort. While some corporate partners made one-time donations (see list to the right), others including Safeway and Credit Union Central, collected funds through in-store campaigns. Financial donations gave Red Cross the capacity to provide immediate financial support to people affected by the flood – helping them to buy the basics such as food and clothing.

Corporate Donations

- CIBC (\$25,000)
- Manulife (\$10,000)
- RBC (\$25,000)
- Wal-mart (\$20,000)
- Wawanesa Mutual (\$5,000)

Some of our corporate and government partners allowed their staff to volunteer for the Canadian Red Cross on company time or granted holiday time on very short notice. Assiniboine Regional Health Authority, Curves, DUHA Colour Services, Shorty's Fencing and the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce are some of the companies whose staff provided leadership, financial, human resources and logistical expertise.

Red Cross volunteers answer the call to help Manitobans



Red Cross volunteers help people affected by flooding in St. Adolphe, MB

When the Province asked the Canadian Red Cross to help with the flood response, we turned to our volunteers. They came from Winnipeg, they came from all over Manitoba and they came from all over Canada. Just over 130 volunteers dropped what they were doing or put their lives on hold to help the most vulnerable. To date, our volunteers have logged more than 6,200 volunteer hours (and counting) helping flood affected people get the resources they need to survive and get back to a normal way of life.

Our volunteers provided a wide range of skills and experience – registering people at reception

centres, connecting with people in flood impacted communities (both by phone and in-person), helping to manage our call and emergency operations centres; and providing guidance and experience, in often very stressful situations.

Once again, when the community turned to the Canadian Red Cross, we responded with a corps of well-trained and compassionate volunteers supported by an equally dedicated team of 10 staff members in Manitoba; all under the guidance from Disaster Management leaders from Red Cross headquarters in western Canada and Ottawa.

"The Red Cross is known around the world for helping people during disasters and that was no different in Manitoba with the spring flooding. We appreciate how the Red Cross reached out to people in our community by providing the essential needs and other support when they needed it most."

Bob Stefaniuk
Mayor - Rural Municipality of Ritchot

Volunteer support

- 130 Red Cross volunteers
- 6200 Red Cross volunteer hours
- 1500 People registered by Red Cross volunteers
- 600 Home & community meetings
- 660 Families received food, cleanup supplies and other basic necessities by Red Cross volunteers

Below, a group of our Disaster Management volunteers quickly pose for a group picture before heading out into the community.



Canadian artists Rise Again to help flood affected communities



Just like they did following the 1997 flood, some of Canada's best performers donated their time and talent to a benefit concert to support Manitobans affected by the 2009 Red River Flood. Led by Tom Jackson, Rise Again 2009: The Red Cross Manitoba Flood Relief Concert took place at the MTS Centre in Winnipeg in front of 1200 generous and appreciative fans.

The concert line-up included: Tom Cochrane, Deborah Cox, JD Fortune, Bet.e, Nathan, One More Girl, Beverley Mahood, Moses Mayes, the Royal Winnipeg Ballet and The Barra MacNeils.

Rise Again 2009 could not have taken place without generous corporate support from Enbridge Pipelines, Paquin Entertainment Group, Epic, Long & McQuade, MTS Allstream, MTS Centre, Place Louis Riel, Sound Art, Ticketmaster, Westjet, and The Winnipeg Free Press. Both the City of Winnipeg and Province of Manitoba offered their support, including a \$100,000 pledge from Steve Ashton, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs.

Anyone who missed the concert was able to watch a condensed version rebroadcast on APTN and CBC TV Manitoba. CBC Radio Two also rebroadcast the concert.



Two members of the Royal Winnipeg Ballet and J.D. Fortune perform at Rise Again.



Tom Jackson (above) not only organized Rise Again, but hosted and performed.



Red Cross is on appeal for funds to help people affected by spring flooding. You can help with a donation: call 1-800-418-1111 or visit www.redcross.ca

Johnny Reid donates performance and proceeds from Winnipeg concert to help flood survivors

During one of Johnny Reid's four sold-out shows in late March at Club Regent Casino in Winnipeg, he decided right there on stage to play a fifth. Except this last-minute show would raise funds for the Canadian Red Cross in preparation for anticipated flooding in Manitoba. The concert sold-out quickly and raised \$16,000 for the Canadian Red Cross. Manitoba Lotteries Corporation (MLC) matched the tally and in total, \$32,000 was raised overall. MLC also donated the use of the casino's main stage and some staff donated their time along with

IATSE Local 63 members who donated their stage management skills. Ticketmaster donated its service charges for the March 29 and once again, MLC matched the donation. The concert was full of inspiration and Johnny often personalized his songs with stories about helping others who need it most; and not taking for granted the important things in life such as community and family.



(Top and bottom left) Johnny Reid performs at Club Regent Casino; (Bottom Right) Winston Hodgins (President & CEO - Manitoba Lotteries) Johnny Reid and Jane Hunt (Red Cross Manitoba Director) backstage.

Behind the scenes of the Red Cross disaster response

Most of us know how Red Cross helps those who need it most during disasters, but many of us are unaware of what an enormous project it is to implement, monitor and measure a Disaster Response Team's activities and outcomes. To help provide some perspective, we decided to ask one of the team's directors - Cheryl Baldwin.

What does a Disaster Response Team (DRT) Director do?

"A DRT Director oversees all the Red Cross activities during the disaster response. Everything from logistics to human resources to operations. In addition, our role is to work with external partners including the Province and other disaster agencies."

What types of logistics were required for the spring flood?

"There were many. Vehicles; food for volunteers in our call centre or reception centres; accommodations for our volunteers; supplies for the clean-up kits; sometimes we augment clean up kits with extra supplies; comfort kits and other supplies for people forced from their homes. In the recovery phase, Red Cross vouchers are coordinated, distributed and tracked with our finance department; extra cell phones are required; and we often have to relocate resources to communities that need them most."

What is it like to lead a response as a DRT Director?

"No response is ever identical. There are always new challenges and new things to learn. One thing that is always consistent is the team of volunteers and staff is always great."

In this spring flooding response what were some of the main priorities?

"Some of the main priorities were to get the DRT mobilized as quickly as possible so we could start helping people in flood affected communities. In order to do that, we had to assemble our team of volunteers, get space for them set up, and assign roles. Once that was in place we had to get our volunteers where they needed to be; whether they were on the phones in our call centre speaking directly to people who needed help or out in the community at reception centres registering people with the Red Cross. Now in the recovery phase, our priority is connecting with people who need our support. We've done a good job getting funds to a lot of people who need the basics, such as food, clothing and some essential home repairs. We also made sure when we couldn't help, we provided referrals to other agencies that could. However, we're still active today with home visits and we're continuing to re-visit communities that were hit especially hard by flooding."

What was it like working with such a diverse team that consisted of volunteers from all over Canada?

"One of the neat things of being involved with a disaster response is you get to meet a group of amazing people. There is such an incredible network of Red Cross Disaster Management volunteers that can mobilize quickly; they can drop whatever they're doing and come quickly. Red Cross has also standardized its Disaster Management training across the country. It really helped us here in Manitoba because our volunteers would literally arrive from another province and go straight to work helping Manitobans. There was no time wasted explaining policies or procedures."

The Canadian Red Cross invests substantially in training its Disaster Management volunteers to deal with very difficult circumstances in disaster responses. How did that benefit flood survivors here in Manitoba?

"The Red Cross has helped and continues to help people affected by the 2009 flood with financial assistance and support to other resources. One of the most important things a Disaster Management volunteer can do is to listen compassionately and sympathetically while remaining focused on the job of helping people get the resources they need. Having someone (Red Cross volunteer) to talk to who is trained and knows what to expect; and understands and sympathizes with what these people are going through has a huge impact for the people involved far beyond what we can provide financially... Our training also ensures that everyone is treated equally because all of our volunteers operate within the Red Cross Fundamental principles."

Cheryl Baldwin - a VP at the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce - is one of a few senior Disaster Management volunteers who acted as Disaster Response Team Director.



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United Way invests in
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