

INNOVATIVE DOVES

By Jane Foraker-Thompson

2014 has been a year of innovation for the DOVE bof. First they did a survey of their membership in order to find out more about themselves as an organization. Since the purpose of DOVEs is to serve the Red Cross as deployed volunteers at disaster sites, they also wanted to determine their needs and what would help them to be more efficiently functional. A second major innovation occurred at the 2014 Escapade in Goshen, Indiana, where the DOVEs sponsored a Blood Drive which was very successful. Immediately following the Escapade, DOVEs re-grouped at Elkhart, just a few miles away, and carried on several days of training for new and old members alike.

Since all DOVEs are Red Cross Volunteers and must have Red Cross certified training in a variety of areas, and all are RVers, they wanted to know more about themselves so they can serve our own members better, and also to help the Red Cross better understand how to work effectively with DOVE members. Who are we as a group? What are our desires and needs? What are our preferences and experiences? What they found out was sometimes surprising, even to themselves!

The majority of DOVEs are full-time RVers. They drive a variety of RV's from motor homes, fifth wheels, and trailers. The majority also travel with pets, mostly dogs, but also some cats and a few birds. When they are deployed to serve at a disaster site, 88% would prefer to be deployed in their own RV's, with their pets, as opposed to being flown to a disaster site, which is what the Red Cross usually does. Deployment by RV saves both the expense and the anguish of putting their dogs and cats into a kennel situation for several weeks at a time. Sometimes when a couple has a pet, that means one of them will stay home and take care of the pet while their partner goes to a disaster site. When the Red Cross allows DOVEs to deploy in their RVs, both parties of the couple can serve, plus it saves the Red Cross the expenses of housing the volunteers in a motel/hotel while they are volunteering. In addition, volunteers can stay longer.

Forty-six per cent of their members have been DOVES for 6-10 years. Some of the DOVEs were long-time members and volunteers for the Red Cross long before DOVEs was founded in 2001. Ten percent of the DOVE members served the Red Cross from 15-38 years.

The age of the majority of the DOVEs is between 60-69 (56%), while the next most frequent age group is in their 70's (22%). DOVEs are people who are still bright, mentally alert and hearty, which is indicated by the fact that they are still RVing full-time. They are also adventurous, and more than willing and able to help others in their time of need. As a group they are accomplished people, who feel that their lives have been blessed and they want to turn around and give back to society in ways that are helpful and uplifting. Their motivation

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to serve is altruistic. Many of them have practical skills that are useful at disaster sites. Some of those skills come from their previous careers and some from their avocations.

Red Cross volunteers have basic training in First Aid and CPR for both adults and children. Then they can specialize in Shelter Operations, Disaster Mental Health, Disaster Assessment, Bulk Distribution, Warehouse Management, Disaster Assessment, Kitchen Services (food preparation and distribution), driving the Emergency Response Vehicle (ERVs), Forklift driving, Safe and Well Linking of victims of disasters with loved ones elsewhere in the country, Disaster Services Technology (great for computer geeks), Client Casework, Health Services, and many other options. When occasionally one of their members becomes ill, they are supportive of one another.

This year, for the first time, DOVEs know more about their age, circumstances, RVing status, and capabilities of their members. They are proud to be DOVEs and welcome anyone interested to join them. Besides being a hard-working group of volunteers, they are a fun-loving bunch of people and always have dinners together and celebrations when they get together. For further information, go to www.dovebof.org or write to membership@dovebof.org.

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