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CERT Aims to Train East Lansing Residents in Disaster Awareness EAST LANSING, Mich.

A new disaster relief program, the Community Emergency Response Team, is being launched in the next few months in East Lansing. CERT is a federally funded program comprised of volunteers that will be trained in disaster relief and aid, as well as preparation for large events in the East Lansing area. East Lansing police officer Steve Gonzales is supervising the development of East Lansing CERT and presented information regarding its components and its goals to the East Lansing City Council on Feb. 2 during the public session.

CERT is operated and 100% funded through Citizen Corp, which is a network set up by the Federal Emergency Management Agency that works to coordinate emergency response/awareness programs across the country. CERT has the task of training civilian volunteer teams in emergency management. CERT instructors from both the East Lansing Police Department and Fire Department will train selected civilians to be able to organize into a team and respond to any disaster. CERT volunteers can expect to be taught things as small as operating a fire extinguisher, to as big as running a full disaster triage operation.

CERT training will consist of a mix of classroom learning and out of class simulations and exercises. Local officers and firefighters will direct this training. "I'll be teaching people from all walks of life, and of all socioeconomic levels," East Lansing

Fire Marshal Robert Pratt said. Pratt has been Fire Marshal for 12 years and will be one of the instructors in the CERT training modules.

The seven modules include basic disaster preparation, fire suppression, two modules of disaster medical aid, light search and rescue, team organization, and terrorism awareness. Many teams may choose to alter focus based on need. A key word with CERT is versatility, and Gonzalez has said that each CERT team is "designed so that a community can take the concept and tailor it and customize it to fit their needs."

One of the needs that Pratt and fellow CERT instructors see needing addressed in East Lansing is "celebratory based events." Since Michigan State University has many large-crowd events throughout the year, crowd control becomes a priority for EL-CERT. The MSU and Lansing CERT teams have already been involved in managing crowds at events such as The Great Lakes Folk Festival, Homecoming Parade, and the NCAA basketball tournament. East Lansing's team hopes to help out this year in the same capacity. "We may not have to handle any [NCAA basketball] crowds with the way the Spartans are doing this year, but our goal is always to be prepared no matter what happens," Pratt said.

Gonzalez said after the meeting that cooperation has come easily from both the City Council and the community. Anthony Wellman, 19, a lifetime East Lansing resident present for Gonzalez's council presentation said he was surprised but satisfied with what he heard. "Having a son myself, it's good to know that if god forbid he goes missing that there is a team close by that is trained to get him back." CERT's training in search and rescue allows them to be a valuable asset in responding to amber alerts in the immediate vicinity.

EL-CERT has already met its goal of 15 volunteers and hopes to be fully trained and servicing East Lansing by May 2011. Once the program is firmly established, EL-CERT hopes to be able to take on more volunteers, and Gonzalez encourages everyone to join when they can. "There are only two things needed to be a CERT member. Maturity and common sense. We'll teach the rest," Gonzalez said.