

# Putnam Chosen As Pilot For Resilient Children Initiative



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Acting Health Commissioner Dr. Michael Nesheiwat is joined by Loretta Molinari and Kieren Farquhar, two of the founders of the Medical Reserve Corps, at last week's annual dinner.

BY ERIC GROSS

Putnam County has been selected as one of two pilot communities nationwide to assess and improve capacities in meeting the needs of children during crisis and emergency situations.

The Resilient Children/Resilient Communities initiative helps to create and strengthen partnerships among the public, private and non-profit sectors in order to discuss communication strategies, emergency planning and training to coordinate local efforts between emergency management, schools, child care providers, law enforcement and first responders in the event of a major calamity.

The program was explained last Thursday evening to members of the county's Medical Reserve Corps at its annual meeting in Mahopac.

The Putnam MRC consists of a group of local volunteers who support the county in preparing for and responding to disaster or public health emergencies.

Barbara Ilardi, one of the corps' founders, explained that the Putnam MRC was part of a "national, community-based volunteer movement launched after 9-11. Large-scale events along with Hur-

ricanes Katrina and Sandy demonstrated that existing community workforces could easily become overwhelmed. Identifying and training volunteers to be prepared is the best solution."

Jeff Schlegelmilch, Deputy Director of the National Center for Disaster Preparedness, traveled from Washington to address the MRC.

Schlegelmilch noted that his agency recently conducted a survey to "gauge national and local preparedness attitudes and behaviors. The survey illuminated a gap between expectations households have and the reality that America as a whole is not adequately prepared to keep children safe during disasters."

The guest commended Putnam's volunteers: "We face so many challenges as a nation yet in Putnam County volunteerism is alive and well. With this county's assistance along with Washington County, Arkansas, new perspectives and resources will be brought into the area of preparedness and child-focused community-based resilience building."

Barbara Garbarino is serving as project liaison of the local effort.

Garbarino forecast that the three year initiative would

result in the development of a "replica model of child focused community resilience planning that can be brought to a national scale. Studies have shown that when children are unable to return to school or child care quickly, the resulting lack of routine and normalcy can lead to long standing negative impacts. Getting back to these familiar settings can improve children's ability to cope with crises while allowing parents the opportunity to address other issues of family recovery."

Putnam Acting Commissioner of Health Dr. Michael Nesheiwat who today (Dec. 15) celebrates his first anniversary as health commissioner, commended members of the Medical Reserve Corps for their dedication and community spirit: "The number one asset on earth is time. I am honored and Putnam residents are blessed that you have given your time to the MRC."

The 69 members from both eastern and western Putnam in attendance applauded.

New members are always being sought. If interested, contact the Putnam Health Department at 808-1390.

## PUTNAM VALLEY (Cont'd from Page 1)

ism are issues along with the matter of improving

The Boston Globe reported earlier this year that

walking and waiting in dark early morning hours.