

# Keeping Kids Safe During Crisis

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 tornadoes that touched down in May are one example of how unexpected and disastrous events can occur.

The Putnam Community Resilience Coalition (CRC) that is comprised of agencies from the public, private and non-profit sectors works year round to build a strong foundation in order to ensure the safety of children before, during and after disasters.

Putnam County officials are again reminding the public that disasters happen and year round planning is a dire necessity.

The new school year is underway and the CRC has begun to spearhead efforts by bringing the “prep rally” concept to after school programs and daycare centers from Carmel to Cold Spring. Barbara Garbarino is serv-

ing as project liaison of the local effort: “Created by Save the Children, the free program is designed to teach boys and girls in grades pre-K through fifth, the basics of emergency preparedness through fun games and activities.”

Garbarino forecast that the four 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.”

Health Commissioner Dr. Michael Nesheiwat agreed: “Plans must be made for family—strategies that don’t have to be complicated. A list of emergency contacts should be shared among family members and close friends while updating emergency supplies at home.”

County Executive Mary Ellen Odell called the safety of children “crucial. We must do everything possible to ensure their safety and protection. Putnam County officials are calling on every family to abide by the National Preparedness Month theme: ‘Disasters Happen; Plan Now; Learn How.’”

## Fall Community Tag Sale

SPECIAL TO THE COURIER

The Patterson Recreation Center will be hosting the Fall Community Tag Sale on Saturday, Sept. 29, 9 a.m. – 3 p.m. Held in the

air-conditioned gym. Light food and refreshments will be available. Reserve space now. Info: 845-878-7200.

# Journey to Guatemala: Sobering, Exciting and Rewarding

By ERIC GROSS

Nine area residents have returned from a church mission trip to Guatemala.

The seven women and two men, all parishioners of the First Baptist Church in Brewster, reflected on their journey Sunday at a worship service.

Team leader Warren Hall described his teammates as a “great group of people. For me, the trip to Guatemala was extremely emotional since Putnam County brought love and joy to dozens of young girls.”

Church Pastor Travis Mitchell and parishioner Craig Brandt of Carmel visited Guatemala two years ago to begin a relationship with a Christian ministry called Kids Alive International. The organization provides homes around the world to make available emotional, mental, physical and spiritual health to young boys and girls who have experienced abuse.

The group also helps to seek justice for young girls by working with authorities to bring their abusers to court.

During the visit to Central America the pair met with officials of the Oasis Residential Home—a community of family-style residences for girls who reside in family units with Guatemalan Christian house parents.

“The children attend school—many for the first time—and have access to trauma-focused therapy to help heal their emotional wounds. Most importantly, the children are introduced to the transforming love of Jesus—the source of true healing that they desperately need,” said Pastor Travis.

The church decided to continue fostering its relationship with the ministry



PHOTO BY ERIC GROSS

Some of the First Baptist Church team members attend Sunday’s worship service.

and after raising funds during Christmas 2016, sent its own mission team last summer consisting of five women.

The experience was so rewarding that nearly double that number ventured to the Central American nation earlier this summer.

During their trip Hall and his wife Noemi along with Emily Lazorchak, retired Carmel school teacher Carol Fisher, Judy Birdsall of Brewster, Maureen Guido of Carmel, Gina Silicato of Brewster, Jessica Fitzpatrick of Carmel and one man who requested anonymity, painted offices and bathrooms, installed cabinets and interacted with the young girls morning, noon and night.

Even an earthquake measuring 5.6 on the Richter scale failed to deter the group.

Hall told the congregation of about 125, “Guatemala is a beautiful country

that suffers from severe poverty. Sadly, Guatemala leads the world in cases of violence against young women. OASIS has become the safe haven for these girls who receive schooling, life skills and therapy to relieve the trauma they have been through.”

During the mission trip the church members met with 53 girls on campus, ten of whom, aged 10 to 13, are mothers themselves.

Guido, one of the original volunteers with the Carmel Volunteer Ambulance Corps, noted that “volunteers were desperately needed. My passion has always been to assist others in need. The children were so happy to see us. It was a blessing to be there.”

Fisher, who speaks fluent Spanish, described the poverty in Guatemala as “intense. The girls were so loving and caring and appreciative. We even played

Scrabble with them. I never played Scrabble in Spanish before.”

Pastor Travis explained the congregation’s journey resulted in a “local perspective to a global perspective. We want to help the victims of child abuse in Guatemala by showing a heart of compassion through a heart of justice.”

The pastor added: “All it takes is a few minutes for your heart to be gripped with love. Girls enter the program broken and once healed they become young girls again with smiles and song.”

Pastor Travis asked the community to “show humanity’s true nature by raising funds for children in Guatemala to give them hope. The Book of Proverbs tells us: ‘Teach children how they should live and they will remember it all their lives.’”

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