

Opinion



Free Press Viewpoint

Giving blood a community service

Dear Editor:

About every two seconds someone in the United States needs blood and the American Red Cross is working hard to help fulfill these needs. We would like to thank our blood donors for helping to save the lives of patients they don't even know by donating at the American Red Cross blood drive Sept. 14. We had 163 people who came in to share the gift of life.

Statistics show the number one reason people do not give blood is that they are not personally asked. The American Red Cross counts on our loyal blood donors to spread the word about their wonderful experiences. We hope each blood donor will share his or her positive experience with someone who has never donated.

Blood shortages are increasingly common as many people who were once regular blood donors are now in need of medical treatments that require blood. We need more people to make blood donations a routine community responsibility. Donating blood is safe and easy, and something so simple is also so very vital.

Thank you to everyone who made our last blood drive a success - to all of the wonderful volunteer blood donors and all of the generous community volunteers who make the blood drive itself run so smoothly.

Our next Red Cross blood drive is scheduled for Jan. 18, 2006. If you would like to help, please call me at 462-2082.

Thank you for your contributions to this critical and life-saving cause.

Jo Cheney
Blood Drive Chair
(Letter #73)

Comments to any opinions expressed on this page are encouraged. Mail them to the Colby Free Press, 155 W. 5th St., Colby, Kan., 67701. Or e-mail pjschief@nwkansan.com or pdecker@nwkansan.com.

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Scams abound after disasters

Diann Gerstner

● Thomas County Extension Agent

listed on their website (http://www.fema.gov/press/2005/resources_katrina.shtm). At that website you will find addresses for the Katrina Fund overseen by former presidents George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton, as well as emergency relief funds in Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi. The site also lists church-affiliated groups that operate disaster-relief programs and provides information on donating goods and services. As a quick check on only one of the websites listed I clicked on the link to bushclintonkatrinafund.org. Sure enough there was information on sending contributions by mail or online. I then changed only the extension from .org to .com and the very same website appeared. If I wanted to donate online to the Bush-Clinton Katrina Fund I'd probably use the .org extension as it was the direct link from the FEMA website and should assure its legitimacy. The .com could be more questionable. But as a general rule remember .org extensions are not always as legitimate as we'd like to think. Anyone could set up a .org site. The safest method to assure your contribution will go toward Katrina relief is to rely on organizations that have a proven track record. The American Red Cross is best known to capably provide disaster assistance. Many church denominations have disaster relief teams that are very effective.

There is a National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters (NVOAD) group that has been organized long before Katrina hit. I would trust that organization to be legitimate. For a list of their member organizations go to <http://www.nvoad.org>. Another way to check references on organizations is to contact the Better Business Bureau. Their website is <http://www.bbb.org>. Keep in mind that the Better Business Bureau can only tell you if they have had negative or positive reports. They do not have enforcement capabilities.

The state attorney general's office also is a place to check on the legitimacy of various organizations. Go to <http://www.KSready.gov> for helpful information and links. An excellent place to check the legitimacy of charitable organizations is at <http://www.charitynavigator.org>. They have a section for hurricane relief that tells you organizations they have identified so far to steer clear of.

While I've concentrated on electronic scams, don't forget the more low-tech scam methods are at work as well. Telephone and mail solicitations can steal your dollars and your identity. Don't give any information over the phone about your credit cards, bank accounts, employee numbers, etc. Check out mail solicitations before sending money.

There has been enough disaster already. Don't create your own emergency by falling victim to the disaster predators.

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Katrina cripples gulf farms, ranches

John Schlajek

● Kansas Farm Bureau

perately need right now. Most farmers need diesel fuel and other daily necessities so vital to their operations. They are working now to provide feed and fresh water to the surviving animals and working out a plan to handle the lost animals. Officials believe cattle losses could top 10,000 head.

"Timber is down flat," Greg Gibson, Mississippi Farm Bureau, said. "The bottom six tier counties were destroyed."

Early data indicates that approximately 65 percent of the affected timberlands are private, non-industrial owned timber.

Of the row crops in the Mississippi Delta the rice crop was hit the worst. The affected crops are lodged to some degree or flattened. Farmers planted 245,000 acres.

"Because combines harvesting this downed rice crop have to run at one-half the normal speed, producers are having to use two to three times the fuel," Gibson said. "Farmers are paying twice the amount for diesel that they paid last year."

Poultry is big business in Mississippi and this industry suffered huge economic losses. There are approximately 9,000 poultry houses in Mississippi and more than 2,000 poultry farmers. A poultry house typically contains 20,000-25,000 birds.

"Our early estimates indicate that 2,400 poul-

try houses sustained damage, and of the damaged houses, approximately 300 are totally devastated," Gibson said. "A lot of this damage came from the tornadoes. Our value lost due to this storm is enormous when you factor in loss of production, loss of property, increased expenses associated with inflated energy costs, clean-up and income lost during recovery."

Gibson reported that corn yield losses will be substantial with harvest conditions extremely difficult and expensive for a crop in which margins are extremely thin. Cotton was hit with high winds that left the crop gnarled, mangled and in some cases flattened. Mississippi farmers planted 1.2 million acres this year and heavy losses are certain. Soybeans escaped with very little damage.

"The biggest problem our farmers are facing is finding fuel and then paying the prices charged for it," Gibson said.

When everything is tabulated, the numbers are going to be something this country's never seen before. There is no short-term solution in the Gulf region devastated by Katrina.

Agricultural producers are going to need disaster assistance and they're going to need assistance for a long time if they are to get back on their feet.

Right now, these states are looking at survival, saving lives and feeding people, however attention must be paid to the losses in food and fiber production because it's farmers and ranchers who help provide many of those resources.

John Schlageck has been writing about farming and ranching in Kansas for 25 years. He is the managing editor of "Kansas Living."

Doonesbury

● Gary Trudeau

