



HARLAN KIRGAN/Press-Register

Jerry White, right, Red Cross disaster human services administrator for the Southeast Mississippi chapter, discusses an emergency response vehicle with Red Cross volunteers Russell and Barbara Ryals on Wednesday at a training session held in Lucedale.

Volunteers, staff train for a disaster

By **HARLAN KIRGAN**
Staff Reporter

LUCEDALE — From writing a news release to operating an emergency vehicle, about 70 Red Cross volunteers and staff are learning the details of disaster-response in a weeklong training session.

It's the first time Lucedale has hosted the South Mississippi Regional Disaster Training Institute.

"What we are trying to do is put a lot of depth into our workforce, and for us our workforce is volunteers," said Paige Roberts, executive director of the Southeast Mississippi chapter of the American Red Cross. "The depth comes from training beyond the basics."

Sessions, which conclude Friday, are taking place at the Lucedale First United Methodist Church, Lucedale Church of God and Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College campus in Lucedale.

Red Cross volunteers and staff statewide were invited to the training, according to Shirley Phillips, branch manager of the George County Red Cross, which deployed 24 volunteers to missions outside the state this year.

Said Suzanne McKay of Lucedale, a board member of the Southeast Mississippi chapter of the American Red Cross: "Since so many of the volunteers come from Lucedale, we thought it was important to get the Lucedale people the training they need to do the job better."

Several of the volunteers said encounters with Red Cross workers after Hurricane Katrina motivated them to get involved.

"When the Red Cross assisted my family, I knew once we got everybody settled that was some-

thing I would want to volunteer for," said Melissa Dearman of Diamondhead.

She said that she is related to 11 families that lost everything to Katrina. "Red Cross was there to help them every step of the way," she said.

Dearman said she has participated in the response to Hurricane Gustav locally and went to Baton Rouge, La., for Hurricane Ike.

Doris Moorman of Pascagoula said her Red Cross volunteer service makes it "feel like you are giving back what has been given to you."

The retiree from the city of Pascagoula has responded to the Iowa floods, Ike and Gustav.

Another volunteer who said she was motivated to service during Katrina, Cheryl Staicoff of Gautier, was learning to operate an emergency response vehicle this week. "There's a lot more to that thing than just getting behind the wheel," she said.

Staicoff said, "I want to be out in the ERV so that I'm out in the heart of it getting to people and not stuck inside a building and never see what's going on."

Two-member teams inside an ERV deliver food in disasters.

Jerry White, disaster human services administrator for the Southeast Mississippi chapter, showed Barbara Ryals of Lucedale the inside of an ERV on Wednesday afternoon. The ERV can ferry food for up to 1,000 people a day, if necessary.

"Whatever the need is what they do and, of course, the people who operate the ERV work like you can't imagine to get that job done," White said.

"Sounds good to us," said Ryals.