

THE VALUE OF A COLD BOTTLE OF WATER

Loren Knauss spoke to Club members about his experience volunteering for Red Cross disaster aid last year after hurricane Katrina hit the New Orleans region. As Chairman of the Pottawattamie County Supervisors, Knauss has a keen sense of what a community needs to do to be ready for natural disasters. From first hand observations at New Orleans, Knauss observed the biggest problem leading to the disaster after the hurricane was the lack of planning and preparation. Knauss noted he has been a Red Cross volunteer since 1990 and has been involved in several post disaster events including the New York Trade Towers destruction. His work in New Orleans was directed toward arrangement of shelter, safety, and security of victims of the hurricane and subsequent flooding. Knauss reported for duty a day after the hurricane and meet hundreds of people walking the roads away from New Orleans as he drove into the heart of the disaster. There seemed to be no alternative to them except to leave their home and neighborhoods. Knauss said his team worked to set up shelters where ever people congregated. One abandoned school was used even though it had no water or toilet service.

Knauss stated that a very valuable commodity was a cold bottle of water. It not only is immediate relief of thirst and helps to gain trust of distressed victims, but it is valuable for bartering for other needs. Parish sheriff departments were very important for maintaining civil order Knauss noted. Churches were extremely important for providing help to the people. Only local services can respond immediately to disasters, especially if they are prepared for it, Knauss noted. State and federal services won't likely be there for days or weeks later.

Knauss stated the Red Cross is working to train a Disaster Reserve to provide supervision and leadership during disaster relief efforts. He encouraged everyone to volunteer. Workers are needed in the field and in the office during relief times. Knauss offered that our county and community are better prepared for disasters, but preparation is ongoing. Better communications are needed across all departmental groups.