

Alliance for Response- Central Pennsylvania
Summary Article for July 8, 2010 Meeting
From Tom Claeson, 7/20/10

CENTRAL PENNSYLVANIA ALLIANCE GROUP TACKLES DISASTER ISSUES IN MEETING AT HISTORIC SHOWPLACE

Carlisle, Pennsylvania, known as one of the best small towns for the arts and culture in the U.S., and a historical site because of the legendary football prowess of Jim Thorpe, became a center for disaster planning on July 8 when the Alliance for Response-Central Pennsylvania held its most recent meeting.

This Alliance initiative, based in the seven counties surrounding Pennsylvania's capital, Harrisburg, met at the impressive Cumberland County Historical Society Building.

The agenda focused on a wide spectrum of topics: life safety issues and emergency management collaboration for cultural heritage institutions, a disaster vulnerability survey of the host institution, and a discussion on cooperative regional disaster planning and recovery in Central Pennsylvania.

Regional Steering Committee member Amy Ward of Gettysburg College talked about her institution's work in disaster planning, setting the stage for a presentation by her colleague Ron Parr, Life and Fire Safety Coordinator and Interim Safety Manager at Gettysburg. Parr is already well-known throughout Pennsylvania and the mid-Atlantic library community for the excellent outreach he has established between campus and local emergency managers and first responders with the staff of Gettysburg College's Musselman Library. The College Library is a regular entrant in the annual MayDay disaster planning recognition activities which are nationally sponsored by Heritage Preservation, and regionally promoted by the Pennsylvania Academic Library Consortium, Inc. (PALCI).

Parr's presentation on July 8th ran the gamut from logistics planning to fire drills and evacuation procedures. One of the most interesting points he discussed was the "Patterns of the Campus" as far as the times and capacities of building use, and how, as a 35-year veteran firefighter, he takes those trends into account when planning for building safety issues. Parr detailed the concerns he had with the Musselman Library Building, but then talked about how the well-organized staff of the Library developed disaster plans and action plans to keep library patrons safe. Gettysburg infused their library disaster plan with information from responders' point of view, then used the document as a tool to educate staff, through tabletop disaster response exercises, development of "Quick Grab Red Cards" detailing exit procedures for staff, and development of a "common language" between responders and Library Staff for immediate reaction to emergencies. He also detailed the College's use of Shelter-in-Place practices in case of emergencies where evacuation is not recommended, and mentioned the widespread reach of Gettysburg's Emergency Mass Notification System. Some other interesting highlights of Parr's presentation:

- Gettysburg's Department of Public Safety has drawings of all buildings on campus on flash drives so they can have them accessible when responding to emergencies at the different facilities.
- The Department of Public Safety promotes fire and personal safety through activities including pizza box stickers, mail/radio/Web announcements, and by sponsoring an annual "Spring Fling" concert event.

Parr's presentation drove one attendee to exclaim "if I had kids in College, I would send them to Gettysburg!"

Parr joined the attendees on a tour of the large and extremely well-designed Cumberland County Historical Society, designed to spot any disaster risks/hazards/vulnerabilities (the potential causes of future emergencies) and to train the participants as to what to look for at their own facilities. The tour was led by CCHS Facilities Manager Mark Davis and narrated along the way by representatives of every department of the organization. The building had surprisingly few problems in comparison to some of the facilities where the attendees work, according to their comments in a de-brief session. Two interesting findings from the de-brief of the tour included Parr's summary comment that Cumberland County Historical Society has a "gorgeous building that is well-maintained, and the staff know a great deal about emergency preparedness issues," and a comment by a CCHS volunteer who said she had "worked at the facility for 30 years, but saw things in this tour which she had never seen before, due to the lecture on safety issues."

The earlier meeting activities left only a small amount of time for discussion on regional cooperative disaster planning issues; these topics will be covered in greater detail at future meetings. At this meeting, the discussion groups included the leaders of the State Archives, State Library, and some of the region's leading colleges and universities, but also attracted participation from some small (and one very new) historical societies and museums. Some key discussion points included recognizing the need for planning and future disaster supply caches in both an Eastern and Western location in the region due to the fact that the Susquehanna River may be the cause of the disaster and it splits the region down the middle. Additional work to spread the influence of the Alliance for Response's Central Pennsylvania Listserv to other cultural heritage institutions was suggested. Finally, the group discussed sharing and compiling disaster plans between local cultural heritage institutions, and proposed a "Disaster Planning Clinic" as a future meeting topic.

The group plans to meet again in the Fall, but will also be able to take advantage of an upcoming national conference to be held locally. The Pennsylvania Office of Commonwealth Libraries and LYRAsIS are sponsoring a conference, "The Pennsylvania Project: Research into Optimal Environmental Conditions for Paper-Based Collections," on September 16 in Harrisburg. The conference will focus on the findings of the Institute of Museum and Library Services-funded Research project on improvements in collections storage conditions including environmental controls, security, and fire suppression within the State Library's Rare Collections Library, and how tests and findings from that work are being used to suggest improvements at 15 libraries and cultural heritage institutions within the Commonwealth.

For further information on the Central Pennsylvania Alliance for Response, or the September 16th Conference at the State Library, please contact Tom Clareson at tom.clareson@lyrasis.org.