

## **Prepare for Hurricanes, then Prepare to Volunteer!**

### **Opinion by Wendy Spencer**

*Wendy Spencer is Chief Executive Officer of the Governor's Commission on Volunteerism and Community Service, commonly called Volunteer Florida.*

It hardly seems possible, but hurricane Season is upon us once again. Among the many lessons the past two hurricane seasons have taught us all is the importance of being prepared! The good news is that a recent Florida Hurricane Preparedness Survey, conducted by the Florida Association of Broadcasters, tells us approximately two-thirds of Floridians are stocked with least 72 hours' worth of food, water and other vital hurricane preparedness supplies. But being ready for hurricanes doesn't stop with stocking up!

We all remember the four devastating storms of 2004, when more than 140,000 volunteers stepped up to become the largest volunteer mobilization in the history of U.S. natural disasters to date. In 2005, volunteers proved their value once again, compassionately providing more than \$100 million worth of assistance to Floridians affected by Hurricanes Dennis, Katrina and Wilma.

In this period of increased tropical activity, it's vital not only for everyone to prepare, but also to prepare to volunteer! Governor Bush has called on Floridians to unite in creating a year-round "culture of preparedness," and that includes getting ready to help after disaster strikes! All indications are that together we face another active hurricane season, and volunteers are essential to a successful response. I urge all Floridians to **get trained** so they know exactly what to do when their assistance is needed most – in the aftermath of a hurricane.

Throughout the year, many experienced disaster relief agencies, including faith and community-based organizations, provide training to potential disaster recovery volunteers in order to ensure their efforts are maximized. Everyone should contact organizations like the American Red Cross, the Salvation Army,

or your favorite faith or community-based agency that provides relief services. Ask them about available training opportunities.

I also urge all faith and community-based organizations to start planning now – if they haven't already done so – to assist those in need after disaster strikes.

Under Governor Bush's leadership, the state of Florida is, for the first time, providing an online tool to assist you in creating a family preparedness plan. To complete your plan, visit [www.floridadisaster.org](http://www.floridadisaster.org) and click "Get a FAMILY Plan" or "Get a BUSINESS Plan." Simply register, complete a short survey and the Web site will generate a complete preparedness plan for you. This plan includes contact information for the American Red Cross chapter closest to you.

Everyone also should contact a volunteer center in their area for additional information about volunteer training and opportunities. For more information about volunteering in disasters, links to disaster relief organizations and volunteer centers, and other volunteer resources, please visit Volunteer Florida's Web site at [www.volunteerflorida.org](http://www.volunteerflorida.org).

Many Floridians have benefited from the selfless actions of disaster volunteers. Their contributions are a testament to the true strength of our great state! Together, we can ensure this tradition continues. Please ... make volunteering an integral part of your disaster preparedness plans.