

The TIMES

of Middle Country

Serving Centereach • Selden • Northern Lake Grove

Volume 3, No. 16

August 9, 2007

75¢

Are you ready for a major disaster?

Catastrophe Readiness Fair at the library should help teach you how to be prepared

BY PETER C. MASTROSIMONE
petermastro@tbrnewsletters.com

What if Chicken Little were right, and the sky did fall? Would you be prepared?

The Middle Country Public Library, the Long Island Association and the Allstate Foundation all hope you are. That's why they're jointly holding a Catastrophe Readiness Fair at the library's Centereach branch August 14. All are welcome.

The event will feature a panel of officials whose work is key to disaster planning, including state Senator John Flanagan (R-East Northport), a member of the Senate Committee on Veterans, Homeland Security and Military Affairs; Sergeant Jim Caiaccia, the Suffolk County Police Department's emergency management commander; and Bert Cunningham, the Long Island Power Authority's vice president for communications.

Attendees will get a chance to speak to the panelists as well as representatives of several government agencies and private concerns that deal with disasters, including the Red Cross.

And there will be a continental breakfast waiting for all who attend.

The forum is designed to inform people about Long Island's emergency preparedness while giving them tips on how to prepare their own families and businesses for events like hurricanes, terror attacks and medical epidemics, according to Library Director Sandy Feinberg.

For example, Feinberg said, the panelists will disabuse residents of any notion they may have that they could evacuate the Island in case of a catastrophe.

"I think people assume they can just get in a car or get in a plane and go, and I don't think that would be feasible for most

people," Feinberg said. "Evacuation is really not an option you should be thinking of, unless maybe if you're on the border of Queens and Nassau."

The event should get people thinking about the things they can do to prepare ahead of time, like making sure their children know what to do if communications are suddenly cut off.

"I think those are very personal things, very real things," Feinberg said.

And, she added, residents should realize that they may be in a jam for a significant time if disaster strikes, not just for a couple of hours.

If, for example, a category one hurricane — the weakest kind — hits Long Island, "LIPA says they would need nine days to fully restore power to the 600,000 people, or residents, that would be out," Feinberg said.

Families and small businesses alike need to be ready, the director said, as larger institutions already are.

"Bigger places have to face it," she said of contingency planning. "The library has a plan. It's when you get into your small, 20-person businesses that I think they'll get a lot out of it."

Some of the lessons people might take from the seminar are those others learned the hard way. Feinberg recalled that after Hurricane Gloria hit in 1985, when she was an assistant library director and the building was being expanded, the damage to library facilities showed the need for one particular modification to the plans: putting bathrooms in the basement.

The library, already by its nature a source of information and a key part of

Readiness forum

Continued from page A1

the glue that holds the Middle Country community together, is hosting the fair because it contains a Catastrophe Readiness Clearinghouse. The center provides preparedness materials and other resources to anyone who visits it.

Funded by roughly \$100,000 in grants from the Allstate Foundation, the clearinghouse is unique on Long Island, according to Krista Conte, the foundation's corporate relations manager.

The nonprofit entity is the Allstate Insurance Company's "giving arm," Conte said, a way for the firm to be "a good corporate citizen" by helping people prepare for emergencies.

Conte noted that a recent survey of Middle Country residents showed that more than three out of four believe a disaster will strike eventually.

"That I think is a testament to the Catastrophe Readiness Center," Conte said. "If people believe a catastrophe is going to happen, which clearly they do, given the survey results, then they will get themselves, their families and their businesses prepared before catastrophe strikes."

The fair begins at 8:30 am with breakfast and registration. Attendees are asked to RSVP ahead of time, but may just show up, Feinberg said.

Continued on page A6