

Charlestown takes the lead in Emergency Preparedness

by Patriot-Bridge correspondent

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CAPTION: At the Sept. 10 ReadyBoston press conference at Orchard Park. Mayor Thomas M. Menino announced that Charlestown was chosen to pilot the CERT program for the City of Boston.

Pictured, left to right, at the event are Chief Richard Serino, EMS; Pat Simpson, MGH Charlestown EP Community Outreach Coordinator; Mayor Menino; and Boston Fire Commissioner Roderick Fraser.

September is National Emergency Preparedness month. Massachusetts General Hospital, in collaboration with the Office of Homeland Security and the Boston Public Schools is planning a series of programs and events this month to continue to educate the community in Emergency Preparedness.

“The collaboration is building on the partnerships we have been developing with community organizations, businesses and community leaders,” said Peggy Carolan, executive director of the MGH Charlestown Health Care Center. “MGH has recognized for several years now the need for such a program.”

MGH has a community coordinator for Emergency Preparedness under both a City of Boston and State of Massachusetts grant. Patricia Simpson, R.N., has been organizing the Charlestown community to prepare for emergencies.

Community Offered Response Team training supported by Mayor Thomas M. Menino’s Office of Homeland Security has been offered to Charlestown, which has been chosen to be the first community in the City of Boston to pilot this curriculum. Twenty Charlestown residents have joined the CERT team. CERT training is designed to prepare you to help yourself, and your neighbors in the event of a disaster, natural or man-made. The training covers basic skills that are important to know in an emergency. With training and practice and by working as a team, we can prepare our homes and families for effective disaster response. Paul Holloway, Lt. John Hardiman and Lt. Philip McGovern are teaching this 10-week course that covers various aspects of preparedness.

Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Boston Public Schools Facilities Management Department are piloting the STEP program, (Student Tools for Emergency Preparedness) for the fourth graders from the Warren-Prescott School. This program will stress the importance of every family having a family emergency plan, as well as a “to-go bag.”

“The Boston Public Schools Facilities Management Department has been very forward in helping us integrate the program into the school,” said Domenic Amara, principal of the Warren-Prescott School.

“They see Emergency Preparedness as part of their role in providing for student safety.”

The school’s pilot program is being coordinated by Rick Deraney, Boston Public Schools director of Fire

Safety and Emergency Preparedness. Deraney was instrumental in bringing FEMA and the Boston Public Schools together.

“BPS facilities management is working closely with schools to bring effective emergency preparedness education to the communities,” said Deraney. “This takes leadership at every level, commitment, planning and the ability to think out of the box.”

Deraney said that the best way to present emergency preparedness materials is to really from the scope of making it non-threatening, taking advantage of everyday moments to incorporate it and doing it in a way that includes children.

Simpson said as part of Emergency Preparedness Month activities, local churches and the Neighborhood Watch groups will be distributing emergency preparedness checklists, the Warren-Prescott School will be conducting an Evacuation Drill and the Zelma Lacy House will participate in a Homeland Security Tabletop Drill, which tests the responses of an assisted living facility to an emergency scenario.

“Emergency Preparedness must be an ‘all hazards’ approach,” said Carolan, adding that “creating a household emergency plan, making a household emergency to-go kit, being informed about various hazards, and getting involved in community preparedness organizations is key to the success of effective planning.”