

## A Volunteer at Work

By KELLY McNULTY, Member

I was scheduled to be laid off on September 30, 2001. I had long admired the American Red Cross, so I periodically checked its Web site for opportunities. Then, from my office in Fair Lakes, Virginia, I watched in horror as the events surrounding the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 unfolded. Hoping to assist with disaster relief efforts at the Pentagon, I applied to volunteer with the Red Cross. But only trained volunteers could help, so my application wasn't reviewed until disaster efforts became less urgent.

September 11 put my layoff into perspective. I felt lucky to be alive. Shortly after, I was contacted by a recruiter from the American Red Cross National Headquarters who had seen my résumé online. I got the job a month before my volunteer activities with the local chapter began.

### Ensuring a Safe Blood Supply

I am a technical writer in the test engineering (TE) group of the information technology (IT) department. I support documentation produced during the software development life cycle for blood and donor application systems used by Blood Services's internal clients. The Red Cross is a manufacturer of blood and blood products (it provides almost half of the nation's blood supply); thus, many of its systems are regulated by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). I help develop and update IT policies and procedures according to FDA guidelines to ensure the safety of the blood supply.

I also develop, maintain, and update the TE job aids—guidance and templates for developing test documents and test planning and execution—and facilitate meetings with the TE managers to discuss these aids. I troubleshoot formatting problems, produce a staff newsletter with format and documentation guidance, serve as administrator of



**A Red Cross volunteer assists a Hurricane Katrina survivor.**

the Microsoft *SharePoint* TE portal, and sometimes even teach coworkers first aid and cardiopulmonary resuscitation.

I rarely see the end products that I support. So it was quite rewarding, after working on documentation for a software release upgrade, to use the Electronic Blood Donation Record (eBDR) application as a volunteer blood donor. I entered my health history (which formerly was done manually via an interview) and saw the resulting time savings and increased accuracy that we deliver with our technology.

### Responding to Disaster

As a volunteer, I am a disaster action team leader providing support in local and regional disasters. I am also deployed on national assignments and assist with mass care (feeding and sheltering). When Hurricane Katrina devastated the Gulf Coast in 2005, my initial involvement was as a volunteer conducting client casework over a weekend at the local chapter headquarters (assist-

ing evacuees coming to the DC area). When I arrived at work on Monday, the office was bustling. The response call center for general information (+1-866-GET-INFO) operates from my building and was buzzing with calls. A financial assistance call center had appeared overnight in the cafeteria. Only critical Blood Services project work continued; IT staff were diverted into various disaster relief positions alongside disaster volunteers.

I reviewed how the cases coming into the call center were dispatched and redirected any that were incorrectly assigned. I also staffed the financial assistance call center, interviewing Hurricane Katrina clients over the phone and disbursing immediate financial assistance via Western Union.

### A Unique Mission

Overarching the work I do every day is the unique mission of the American Red Cross. This drives the heart and soul of the organization, my coworkers, and my personal fulfillment at work. The atmosphere on the job is unlike any typical IT business. I work with the most amazing, caring, can-do people I have ever encountered. While my job and volunteer work are separate activities, one reinforces the other—and, ultimately, there's just one Red Cross. **i**



**The author with a quilt from the 1980s that represents each of the American Red Cross Blood Regions. The signatures come from Blood Regions staff members.**

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