

The project is the brainchild of Gary and Elyse Dietrich, longtime Sacramento media professionals. The couple founded a nonprofit called Citizen Voice five years ago to combat what they saw as increasing public disillusionment generated by partisan politics. The organization aims to inspire, inform and involve citizens in nonpartisan activities that benefit their communities, especially helping those who are most at risk.

They launched Safely Out on the first anniversary of Katrina and plan to distribute 100,000 kits throughout the Capital Region as the first stage in a campaign that will roll out across the state and eventually the nation. This summer volunteers went door-to-door to distribute kits to South Lake Tahoe residents under the greatest threat from the Angora fire. The project has gained the enthusiastic support of the Sacramento Metro Chamber, which will enlist local companies in the effort by urging them to purchase the \$10 kits for their own employees and to underwrite the cost of additional kits for those in need.

This is citizen action at its very best: a grassroots neighbor-helping-neighbor effort, with no reliance on government bureaucracy or tax dollars. It appears to be the first such approach that targets our most vulnerable citizens during a disaster and involves the entire community in the evacuation effort, thus relieving the burden on emergency responders and caregivers.

In this season of giving, marked by our annual Capital Region Cares special issue, I urge you to join me in supporting Safely Out. Send in the attached business reply card, or get more information by visiting the Citizen Voice website citizenvoice.org or calling 916.503.3194.

As we approach flood season, put Safely Out at the top of your list for charitable giving this year and help guarantee that all of us — no matter how vulnerable — can be protected during a disaster.

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P.S. From all of us at Comstock's, happy holidays.

Protecting our neighbors

We learned many hard lessons from the disastrous flooding unleashed on New Orleans by Hurricane Katrina in August 2005. Among them, each of us must take individual responsibility for his or her own safety during a disaster, whether it be flood, fire, earthquake or terrorism. A lone government agency can't possibly cope with moving hundreds, even thousands of its citizens out of harm's way.

But what happens to our fellow citizens who, like many of the nearly 1,500 who died in New Orleans, are not physically capable of saving themselves? They may be elderly, disabled, mentally ill or too poor to have transportation — but there are many of them.

In Sacramento County more than 150,000 vulnerable residents live in neighborhoods that could be inundated by more than two feet of water during a severe flood, according to *Sacramento Bee* research. Local emergency responders interviewed by the *Bee* acknowledge they simply do not have the resources to rescue most of these individuals during an emergency.

Protecting vulnerable residents during a disaster is the goal of an innovative effort called Safely Out, a local pilot project that enlists neighbors to help one another. In effect, the project makes all of us first responders and does so in a deceptively simple way: A Safely Out kit provides a brightly colored door sign that tells others if help is needed. Other components make it easy to gather and store critical emergency contacts and information.



*"Nothing great
was ever
achieved
without
enthusiasm."*

—Ralph Waldo Emerson