

HOPE Animal-Assisted Crisis Response

President's Message

November 3, 2008

Dear HOPE AACR Members,

This is my favorite time of year – autumn. We here in Southern California are getting our first taste of cooler weather and it's actually been raining on and off since early Saturday morning. Here in Southern California, rain is a big deal! I hope all is well with each one of you, and I hope this time of year brings you happiness.

Even though it's been awhile since I last wrote to you, a lot of things have been going on behind the scenes. As I wrote in my last message, HOPE AACR would be growing over the summer. And, indeed it has! As a result of holding three certification workshops (EUS, RMR, and PSW), we've added 35 new members, for a total of 114 members nationwide! We are thrilled to have so many new teams. We now have teams in Colorado, Utah, Illinois, and Missouri. HOPE is indeed growing!

A New Region!

As many of you know, we now have a fifth region – known as the Southeast Region. The new region was formed July 28th and is headed by Deborah Hatherley. SER has been very busy organizing themselves since their founding. They have been working hard making response agency contacts so when a crisis or disaster strikes, SER will be known by these agencies.

HOPE AACR and the SER region has a wonderful opportunity to be featured by The Weather Channel. They will soon be filming a story about the work of HOPE. Once completed, this will be aired across the nation!

SER has an opportunity to help our men and women in uniform who will be coming home from Iraq sometime in December. A military home-coming is a stressful time for families and for those returning. This is especially true for those returning who won't have a family member to meet them at the airport. HOPE teams are on stand-by so when this happens we'll have teams ready to be a part of the home coming. This opportunity was offered to SER by Operation Homefront (<http://www.operationhomefront.net/>) which is a national organization who helps families of our troops. You might consider finding out if there is a chapter in your area. This opportunity is open to ALL HOPE AACR teams across the nation. If you might be interested in traveling to SER to help with this response, please email Deborah Hatherley at serrd@hopeaacr.org.

Membership Renewals

We are busy preparing for our annual membership renewal period, which begins December 1st and ends January 31st. As we did last year, your membership renewal can be done online at the HOPE website, under Members Only. In fact, we are asking that ALL members renew online rather than by mail. We realize that a few of you may not have access to the internet. For those members we will have paper forms available, through your Regional Director only. Renewing

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online is easy for you *and* it helps make the job of processing all the renewals easier for the membership committee. I will send an email letting you know when to start renewing. Again, our goal is to start on December 1st. If for some reason you cannot renew by January 31st, please let our member chair and your regional director know. Diane can be reached at: membershipchair@hopeaacr.org.

Recent Decisions by the Board of Directors

1. ID cards for our dogs is no longer required. In fact, we prefer that you not put an ID card on your HOPE dog. They may wear the ID tag, just not the ID card.
2. We encourage members to be part of other agencies, including other AACR organizations. However, if you belong to another AACR group, you are not eligible to be in a leadership position or serve on committees. Please keep your regional director informed of your affiliations.
3. The official uniform shirt for HOPE AACR is the collared polo shirt with embroidery. We've discontinued all shirts with silk-screening. You may continue to wear these shirts, but you should also have a polo with the logo embroidered on it. If you don't have one, please make plans to purchase one.
4. A new HOPE brochure (Rev. G) has been approved and 2500 were purchased. Brochures are being made available to teams via your regional director. It's also available on the HOPE website.
5. The 2009 Annual Board Meeting and Annual Members Meeting will be held June 27 & 28, 2009 in Richmond, Virginia. We encourage all members to make plans to attend these meetings. Dogs are welcome!

Work in Progress

Where do I begin?! So many things are actively in work by the various committees we have in HOPE. Here's a run down of those activities:

1. **Education & Training** – As I am sure you'll agree, the education and training of teams is vital for delivering professional services to those we help. The E&T committee is working to standardize our entire training program. So far they have revised the Open House materials and are nearly complete in revising the Screening process. The next task will be huge and that is revising all the Workshop materials. In addition to these items, they will be creating a complete Evaluator Training Program. All HOPE members are potential screening and workshop evaluators. The intention is to train members for this very important role. The emphasis of this training will be to teach members how to mentor Hopefuls' so they have the best chance for success.
2. **Membership** – I am pleased to announce that we have a new membership committee chair, Diane Valentine. Since taking this position in September, Diane and the committee have been working to document all of our membership policies and procedures. Currently, the board is looking at the policies related to membership ID cards. We are hoping to approve very soon some important changes related to the ID cards. One such change is setting up the cards so there is NO expiration date. This will save all of us from needing to buy new cards

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every two years. If approved, ID cards will only be valid with a current letter of certification. Letters of certification go out each year when you renew, or when you joined. Our current policy is that all members must carry this letter with you while on HOPE business.

3. **Policies & Bylaws** – we've had a project in work now for about four years to rewrite our bylaws. Eric Rynar is heading up this committee and has made good progress moving this complex work along. The goal is to have the new bylaws in place by the annual meeting in June.
4. **Fundraising** – raising funds for national and regional usage is always a difficult task. Taryn Hefler is heading up the national fundraising committee. One of the efforts of this committee was to setup the online Shopping Mall we have on our website. Please take advantage of this to make some of your holiday purchases this year. You will help raise funds for HOPE in the process! Make a note and attach it to your computer to help you remember this option exists.
5. **Services & Operations** – The services and operations manual is undergoing a top to bottom revision. Amy Rideout is leading this effort and has made great progress towards completing this very important task.

Another *very* important issue we are dealing with is how we order uniform items. We are working on setting up a way you can order items online. This will hopefully improve the delivery time for items purchased and it removes us from being in the middle of transactions. More information about this will be passed to you as soon as its available.

6. **Public Relations** – As was previously mentioned, our long awaited Rev. G brochure is now available. One of the new features of this revision is a place whereby you can print your local contact information. A Word file is available on the website under Brochure Info that you can use to print your contact information by running brochures through a printer.

The website continues to be revised and updated with information. Our goal is to make the website a library of information for HOPE members. Look at the calendar page often to see what events are upcoming. Log on the Member's Only page to see what's been added. The Service History page is undergoing a major change and will soon be released. Check out the HOPE News page from time to time. Articles, or article links may be posted here. In addition, reports can now be filed online. These will be available to all members online once they are approved by the region director they are submitted to. This will be helpful for reading about what teams encounter on call-outs, drills, and events. To file a report, log on to the Member's Only webpage, then go to Online Reports.

7. **Animal Welfare** – the long awaited team welfare guide will soon be made available to all members after the board of directors gives its approval. Claudine Singer heads the Animal Welfare committee and together they have created a very important work titled, "Team Welfare Guidelines". This work was specifically developed to help keep HOPE teams safe while deployed on a call-out. The emphasis is, of course, on our dogs. In addition, the manual provides all kinds of reference materials.

One feature of this work is called the "SOS card". This is a card that will be made for each team that shows important information, such as our stress signs, our dogs stress signs, any medical alerts you might want to indicate, emergency contact information, and a list of reminders of conditions we need to be mindful of on a call-out. We're hoping to implement the SOS cards early in this coming year.

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Goals for 2009

As this year gets shorter I am looking forward to what 2009 has in store for HOPE AACR. I would like to share with you some goals I have for this great organization.

1. **Finish Infrastructure Projects** - Since becoming president of HOPE in March 2007, we have tried to keep *infrastructure* projects moving toward completion. These projects have been noted in the *Work in Progress* section above. Finishing these projects is a high priority for us. Why? In order to be prepared for the future, HOPE needs a solid foundation to operate from. These projects, once completed, will help the organization operate more smoothly, without major involvement by the board of directors and our members. For these reasons, I will continue to encourage each committee to complete their projects in 2009.
2. **Develop Relationships** – Because our focus has been infrastructure projects we have little time to focus on building relationships with agencies that might choose to call us out. Because of this we have very little work for our members. Building these relationships must be a high priority in 2009. Before agencies will call us out, we need to demonstrate our professionalism and we have to earn their confidence. This takes *personal contact* over a period of time. Every member of HOPE is potentially a sales person. HOPE leadership cannot do this alone. As such, tools and training need to be provide so you feel more comfortable sharing with others what we do. As we build relationships with decision makers in response agencies, we can work toward setting up Support Agreements. These agreements will be the key to putting teams to work when a crisis or disaster strikes.
3. **Develop Sponsorships** - Although the financial position of HOPE is stable, we have very little operating capital dedicated for direct services. We are primarily self funded. Right now teams have to pay for their own expenses. Because training is expensive, some qualified AAT teams decide they cannot afford to go through the screening and training process. Deploying teams is also expensive, especially considering the economic factors we all face. With the right kind of sponsors, some of these expenses can be covered. The effort to raise funds and develop sponsors has been on the back burner almost from the founding of HOPE. This effort needs to grow *significantly* in the coming year.
4. **Develop Partnerships** – One aspect of AACR work that seems to be a growing issue is the creation of new AACR organizations. We shouldn't look at other AACR groups as “competition”, but rather, we should look at other AACR groups as *partners*. However, to be partners we need to understand each other. Opening dialogs with leadership in these other groups is the first step. From that partnership agreements might be reached. HOPE should lead the way in creating basic national standards for AACR organizations. With partnership agreements, and following basic national standards, we all stand to strengthen the credibility of AACR. This effort could help the movement of AACR in our country.

I know the goals I've outlined are difficult, especially in an all-volunteer group. They will take commitment and effort to accomplish. I know many HOPE members are over-committed with various endeavors. However, we need your help to reach these goals. If left to the few, we will probably fall short of reaching any of these goals. Please consider helping in any area you feel you can.

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In Summary

I am committed to the success of this organization and that means helping you succeed in helping others. Your comments, concerns, and suggestions are very important. Please know that you are welcome to contact me at anytime. One problem with a national organization is the distance apart we are. I wish there were time and resources available so we could get together with one another. Though this is not possible, we can communicate by phone or email. I do appreciate hearing from YOU!

As we approach the holiday season, I want to extend my best wishes to each of you, giving a happy pat and hug to all your dogs.

Sincerely,

Dave Valantine

President, HOPE AACR