When Kathryn and Scott Palmer planned their Montana summer vacation, they had no idea it would involve a hasty ride on a Chinook helicopter and a brief stay at a Montana Red Cross shelter.

The Virginia couple, who visits the state frequently, knew things were a bit out of ordinary when they arrived at their cabin in the Absaroka Range in southwestern Montana on Memorial Day weekend to find a foot of snow on the ground. Still, they weren’t overly concerned.

But then that snow began to melt, and the rains came. And came. And came some more, washing out the only road in or out. They and close to 50 others also staying in the area were stranded in the Absaroka Range in southwestern Montana.

Evacuated family lands at shelter

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Bozeman pastor opens church to help

June’s catastrophic flooding and last summer’s fires in and around Yellowstone National Park have served as a reminder that “we have each other’s backs,” Pastor Heidi Hester said.

For Hester and her Hope Lutheran congregation in Bozeman, Mont., that meant working with the Red Cross to provide an evacuation center for people fleeing flood waters – locals whose homes were impacted, Yellowstone workers, and tourists whose plans were suddenly upended.

“It was just the right thing to do,” Hester said. “This is part of what it means to be a church here, to be part of the Gallatin Valley. This is our backyard.”

Hosting the shelter coincided with vacation Bible school at Hope Lutheran, but church members and school leaders pivoted to accommodate the shelter, too, and helped haul in supplies for the Red Cross.

“It’s important to give people shelter, physically, emotionally, and spiritually,” Hester said.

Pastor Heidi Hester and her congregation opened the Hope Lutheran Church building in Bozeman to the Red Cross, so volunteers could help those affected by the nearby flooding.

“We aim to live that out.”

Red Cross disaster volunteer Linda Racicot of Bozeman said it was a challenge finding a place for evacuees with the usual location in Livingston under flood risk and many other churches tied up with vacation Bible schools.

“All that relief to have a place where we could open, and how generous of them to make room for us,” she said. “They were flexible and generous.”
Blood drives need cordial helpers

This July, the American Red Cross is recruiting compassionate volunteers to support blood drives. The position description is below, as well as a reminder to gather socially (and virtually) with fellow volunteers, and other news for volunteers.

**POSITION OF THE MONTH.**

Donor Ambassadors ensure that blood donors have a pleasant and fulfilling experience.

**Title:** Donor Ambassador at Blood Drives

**Location:** All blood collection sites could use help, but needs are highest in Missoula, Bozeman, Idaho Falls and the Boise area.

**Time Requirements:** Preferred would be one 4- to 6-hour shift per month for six months.

**Needed availability is Monday through Friday during business hours when blood drives are held.**

**Tasks:** You help blood drives run smoothly by providing excellent customer service, assisting with the registration process, offering refreshments and thanking donors for their contribution.

**Questions? Contact Gini at INBMT.Recruiting@redcross.org or by phone/text at 406-493-8778 for more information.**

**TELL US WHAT YOU THINK.**

We know the world is constantly changing right now, and we want to make sure we are communicating these changes and updates with you in the ways – and at the pace – that you prefer.

Below is a link to a survey asking how we should best communicate these breaking news updates with you – i.e. through Volunteer Connection, RED ALERTS, email, etc. – and how often you would like to receive this information. We hope this survey is focused on those big breaking news items – like changes to the mask policy.

Please take a few minutes and fill out this quick survey, found here:

> https://volunteerconnection.redcross.org/?nd=win_load&formid=10958

**KETCHUP WITH FRIENDS.**

Please join fellow volunteers at our social time, Tuesday, July 12, from 7:30 – 8 p.m. If you attend, you will be eligible to win a door prize. Click here to join the meeting.

If you join and don’t have access, please send Nate Gilbert an email at nate.gilbert@RedCross.org and we will see what we can do to help get you connected.

We hope you can join us this month. See you all there!

Here is a link to a video if you need help joining the meeting:

> https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IYdZYP9tlTg

**Paul Ayers**

**Longtime Red Cross volunteer, 69, dies**

Recently we received the heartbreaking news that our friend and colleague, Red Cross volunteer Paul Ayers, passed away at his home in Meridian. Paul was 69.

Paul has been a hero to us all and was an amazing Red Crosser – often the first to respond and the last to leave a Red Cross assignment. He provided both a calming and commanding presence.

Among his many hats, Paul was the disaster team coordinator for Ada County and an emergency response vehicle lead and was a Red Cross volunteer for the past six years.

The Red Cross has lost a giant, and we’ve lost a friend. Please lean on each other and don’t hesitate to reach out.
suddenly stranded. “We started talking about provisioning food,” she said.

Before those conversations got very far, the Montana National Guard arrived in Blackhawk and Chinook helicopters, whisking the Palmers, their two children—George, 4, and Charlie, 2—and the other campers out of the Montana wilderness.

A photo of Kathryn during their helicopter ride hugging her boys, who were wrapped in a National Guard jacket to stay warm, is making the rounds on social media. It appears on Page 1.

“It was wild,” Kathryn said.

Once the Palmers were safely on the ground in Red Lodge, Red Cross volunteer Hank Nowak drove them to the Red Cross shelter at the county fairgrounds. There another Red Crosser, Barbara Miner, greeted, calmed and comforted them.

“She was an absolute angel,” Kathryn said.

Barbara got the two boys, who were understandably shaken by the whole experience, sandwiches.

“Then she came back with a mitt full of cookies and Gatorade and water,” Kathryn said. “I felt like I just blinked and everything was at our fingertips. We had all of our family’s basic needs met, and we had the opportunity to take showers or a nap and access to anything from food and hygiene products to baby supplies.

“For a very chaotic situation, everything was so well organized and ran so smoothly.”

The team also began helping the Palmers make arrangements to get to Billings so they could book a flight.

Now back home in the Washington, D.C. area, Kathryn said her boys are still trying to process everything they went through.

“I’ve got two young kids whose sense of safety and security was totally rocked,” she said.

Kathryn, who has been visiting the Red Lodge area since she was a child and thinks of it as a second home, is also digesting what she saw there.

“It was difficult seeing so much of Red Lodge under devastation knowing what we had come from,” she said.

“The inconvenience of a road being washed out is one thing but for people to be losing their homes to flooding is quite another.”

In less than a week, Red Cross opened seven emergency shelters and evacuation centers across the state in response to widespread flooding. With the help of its partners, Red Crossers served countless meals and snacks and delivered water, cleanup kits and other emergency supplies. Now the organization is shifting into recovery phase, working with emergency officials to assess the damage and provide financial assistance and mental health care to those impacted.

And while her family didn’t end up spending the night in a Red Cross shelter, Kathryn is thankful to know that option was there if they needed it and appreciates the comfort and care they received.

“Everyone was so kind, so courteous, informed and helpful,” she said. “I am forever grateful for what felt like personalized support by the American Red Cross volunteers.”

The unprecedented flooding has caused heartache throughout the region and around the world among people who love the Yellowstone area.

“It’s just heartbreaking to hear the stories of loss and devastation, the loss of homes, the displacement of people and animals,” Linda said.

“We were grateful we could provide a safe place to nourish people, a place for them to clear their heads and decide what they’re going to do next.”

The church also accepted donations to support the Red Cross response and for the Montana Synod Disaster Response Team, and, of course, offered prayers for those affected: “people, animals, all of creation — and for those who stepped up to help in times of trouble.”

The church: Generous

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

The Red Cross of Idaho, Montana and East Oregon CEO Nicole Sirak Irwin joins Teresa Beall and Joe Baldi during damage assessment in Carbon County. Volunteers from across the division deployed to Montana to help out.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Red Cross volunteers Ernie Lytle and workers set up an evacuation center in a Bozeman church to help

Montana Red Cross Executive Director Diane Wright attends an incident briefing with Gov. Gianforte and Red Lodge Mayor Kristen Cogswell.

PHOTOS BY JOHN MCGREW

RED ALERTS!