ON THE HORIZON
- Sound the Alarm Nampa smoke alarm installation event, April 26-27.
- Sound the Alarm Helena, May 3-4.
- Sound the Alarm Billings, May 11.
Read more about these events and how to volunteer on page 2.

MEET A LEADER

JENNIFER SONNICHSEN, engagement lead communications, Bozeman
I have been with the Red Cross for over 10 years and understand the importance of getting our story out to the communities we serve.
With two small children, I enjoy being able to support the communications team from my home.

FUN FACT: In my spare time, I play in a community handbell choir and dance with local hula studios.

Koenig takes new position; Islas joins team
Ted Koenig is the new regional disaster officer for the American Red Cross of Idaho and Montana.
His mission is coordinating the Red Cross’s response to home fires, wildfires and floods across an area including more than 230,000 square miles and home to nearly three million people.
Koenig’s new role is “all about building capacity, sustaining the workforce we have and making sure we’re the ‘volunteer organization of choice,’” he said.
“We’re doubling down on making the volunteer experience one people talk about and want to be part of, which helps us regardless of the immense geography we face.”
He works on strengthening ties with partner agencies, state agencies and nongovernmental organizations that align with the Red Cross mission.
And his primary mission is to support disaster response staff across the region as they build and sustain capacity.

Stepping up to fill a hometown need
Butte native saw opportunity for better disaster response in his community and decided to roll up his sleeves; now he’s urging others to do the same

When John Schlichenmayer moved back to his hometown of Butte six years ago, he noticed that when disaster struck — typically a house fire — there wasn’t always a quick community response.
He was particularly clued into this need after living in Portland and getting involved in emergency response teams that served the poor and homeless there. Schlichenmayer, who manages a Town Pump carwash in Butte, said he spoke with the local disaster and emergency services coordinator for the Butte-Silver Bow area about what he could do.
“I’ve been helping people since I was a kid,” he said. “And I’ve had my bumps along the way.”
Schlichenmayer visited the American Red Cross website and signed up to be a Disaster Action Team volunteer.
For him it’s meant responding to local fires and helping families sort things out and begin the process of getting back on their feet when all seems lost.
“It can be rewarding, and it can be very emotional at times,” he said.
One home fire response sticks with Schlichenmayer. About three years ago, a Whitehall family of six lost their home in a fire. Schlichenmayer received a call from their pastor and was able to help them find a motel and give them the support and services they needed during an extremely difficult time.

SEE TEAM, PAGE 2

Koenig

Interested in becoming a disaster volunteer?
Red Cross is currently recruiting for more Disaster Action Team volunteers, especially in the Butte area.
Visit montanaredcross.org, email IDMT.Recruiting@redcross.org or call 208-258-0592 to learn more.
Help install smoke alarms in Idaho, Montana homes

The Idaho Red Cross and its community partners hope to install 800 free smoke alarms in Nampa homes in April and are looking for volunteers to help.

Volunteers will go door-to-door in Nampa neighborhoods April 20-27, installing free alarms and educating families about fire safety. The event will run from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. both days, and training and hands-on time will be provided. About 170 volunteers will be needed.

Red Cross is partnering with the Nampa Fire Department, the City of Nampa, the Idaho Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, the Consulate of Mexico in Boise and the Hispanic Cultural Center of Idaho during this year’s installation event, which will occur rain or shine.

Volunteers are welcome to take part one or both days. Spanish-speaking volunteers are needed.

To register, please visit montanaredcross.org/nampa.

The Montana Red Cross and its partners will install free alarms in Helena neighborhoods and teach families about fire safety from 2 to 5 p.m. May 3 and from 9 a.m. until noon on May 4. On May 11 from 9:30 a.m. to 1 p.m., the Montana Red Cross will install alarms in Billings homes.

To register to volunteer for either or both days in Helena or for the Billings event visit www.redcross.org/montana.

Home fires are the nation’s most frequent disaster and account for the vast majority of Red Cross disaster responses each year. In 2018 alone, the Red Cross responded to 60,000 home fires, providing emotional support for affected families, help securing critical needs and assistance with urgent recovery needs.

On average, families have less than two minutes to escape during a fire, making smoke alarms the difference. Smoke alarms can make the difference in preventing home fires.

In the past five years, the Red Cross has made major gains in standardizing disaster responses across the country, and Koenig said that will continue to be important.

When Koenig returned to the United States after serving in the Peace Corps in Madagascar, he wanted to find a meaningful career in his hometown of Kalispell. He leapt at an opening with the Red Cross as disaster program manager for western Montana.

Koenig said he has learned to “share the heart of our volunteers and workplace force for the people we serve,” he said.

He will continue to be based in Kalispell. Koenig takes over for Colleen Tote, who was promoted to North Central Division disaster director.

Koenig said in particular he plans to continue Tote’s efforts to “push power to the edges.”

“With a limited footprint for staff across the two-state region, we have to push capacity into the volunteer workforce, truly letting that work force be the face of Red Cross,” Nicole Strand-Lewis, regional CEO, said Koenig has thoughtful ideas about teamwork and collaboration across the region.

“Ted brings long-range strategic planning and sustainable growth ideas to our region with an eye toward continuing the success our teams achieve on many levels,” she said.

Idias joins fundraising team

Luis Islas, formerly of the Idaho Foodbank in Boise, is the Red Cross of Idaho and Montana’s new regional philanthropy officer.

“It has shown exceptional capacity and ability in fundraising,” said Koenig, chief development officer for Idaho and Montana.

“He’s quickly grasped the Red Cross programs and is building relationships, which will ultimately help to secure resources for this important mission.”

Iblas has had a passion for service work since he served as a Peace Corps education volunteer in Madagascar.

During his time there, he promoted malaria awareness and prevention, was a regional project called Hearts to Androy, which worked to gather books from all over the world to service one of the region’s only libraries.

His passion has since transitioned into the nonprofit sector domestically beginning with Idaho Foodbank, first as an AmeriCorps VISTA member focusing on volunteer recruitment and retention, and then as the development coordinator.

He has a master’s degree in business leadership from William Penn University, where he served as a graduate research assistant and was a triple major during his undergraduate studies in political science, history and prelaw.

Iblas was heavily involved in the community and on campus serving as the president of numerous organizations and being named both the Young Leader of the Year as well as the Sophomore of the Year.

— Story by Red Cross writing team volunteer Kristin Isbister

Need: Become a disaster volunteer

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Schlichenmayer says he signed them about once a month.

“He is basically just like a friend,” Schlichenmayer said.

Typically, people are willing to take on those impacted by disaster for a night, maybe two. But when there are multiple people involved it becomes more difficult, Schlichenmayer said.

What he appreciates most about the Red Cross is how it provides help regardless of a person’s marital status, age, religious beliefs, etc.

“The Red Cross is a humanitarian organization,” he said.

March is national Red Cross month and the Montana Red Cross is currently recruiting more disaster action team volunteers, especially in the Butte area. If you’re interested in becoming a Red Cross Disaster Action Team volunteer or know someone who is, go to montanaredcross.org.

Helping people in need is something that he believes the Butte way, Schlichenmayer said.

“It’s neighbor helping neighbor,” he said.

“It’s the way we grow up and the way we should always be.”

— Story by Red Cross writing team volunteer Kristin Isbister