May/June 2020

RED ALERTS!

Keeping our Red Cross volunteers workforce engaged and informed

LOG YOUR HOURS AND WIN! In July, we will have drawings for Red Cross apparel. Volunteers who have logged 20 hours will have four chances to win while those with 100 hours will have eight chances.

SHOW YOUR PRIDE: Complete your volunteer survey and have your voice heard. All eligible volunteers are encouraged to participate here: volunteerconnection.redcross.org/red-survey-hed-survey-OP2321.

Red Cross volunteer health screener Kenneth Akers takes Jaymee Turner’s temperature before she enters a blood drive at the Pocatello mall. Screeners help keep donors and staff safe.

Screeners play key safety role

More volunteers needed to take donors’ temperatures, ask health questions before they enter a donation area

Six years ago, after retiring from a long career as a railroad conductor for the Union Pacific Railroad in Pocatello, Kenneth Akers found himself putting around trying to fill his time. Even though he volunteered as a foster grandparent at elementary schools, he still had hours left in his day. That extra time spent sitting around concerned his lifelong friends, who started referring to Kenneth as a couch potato.

He knew he had to find something else to keep him busy.

For Kenneth, that something became volunteering as a health screener and donor ambassador for the Red Cross of Idaho, a great fit for the well-organized and outgoing 69-year-old.

Up to five days a week, Kenneth stands outside the Red Cross blood donation site at the Pocatello mall, greeting each donor with a handheld thermometer and making sure they’re healthy enough to donate. Each donor also receives a nametag, hand sanitizer and a face mask before entering the donation area, precautions put in place to keep donors and staff safe during COVID-19.

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Idaho student donates convalescent plasma

In early March, Idaho State College student, Lijah Van Gardner attended a medical conference in Las Vegas with several other colleagues. Approximately two weeks after his trip, Gardner began to develop what he thought was the flu, experiencing fever, chills, body aches and eye pain. These symptoms lasted for a couple of days, then subsided. Soon after that he experienced new symptoms that included throat irritation and a complete loss of smell and taste.

Lijah Van Gardner tested positive for COVID-19 after returning from a medical conference in Las Vegas. Now recovered, the college student recently donated convalescent plasma to help others who are ill with the virus.

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Before these enhanced safety precautions were put in place because of COVID-19, 19 patients could help one of my medical textbooks. The donation center was a nice, quiet environment for me to read one of my medical textbooks.

When asked if he would donate again in the future, he candidly said, “Yes! I’d like to continue helping in any way I can.” Gardner continued, “As a student entering the health care field I’m not quite yet on the frontline, so donating while donating lifesaving plasma. The donation took place June 1-12. It’s crucial for Red Cross to keep an accurate record of all cards issued to volunteers and staff in the field.

Disaster Cycle Services volunteers will receive an email called Quarterly Card Verification from Regional Disaster Officer Ted Koenig. It will provide a link to a short online form to record your name and the current count of cards in your possession. All Disaster Cycle Services workers with client assistance cards and/or mission cards must complete the form, regardless of position.

For more information, please contact Angela James at angela.la@redcross.org or call Nate Gilbert at 208-488-5231. Volunteers for these positions are needed in both Idaho and Montana.

Plasma: Board member donates, too

Idaho Red Cross board member Vanessa Fry recently donated convalescent plasma after fully recovering from COVID-19. Fry is also a regular blood donor.

Fry is a regular Red Cross blood donor and also has a special type of blood that’s in high demand for babies. She is CMV-negative, meaning she doesn’t have antibodies from being exposed to Cytomegalovirus, a flu-like virus that about 85 percent of adults have been exposed to. Babies can receive blood only from CMV-negative donors.

“Learning this made my commitment to give even stronger, and the Red Cross makes giving easy,” she said.

To learn more about the convalescent plasma program, visit RedCrossBlood.org/plasma4covid.

Through May 23, 21, convalescent plasma donations have been made at the Boise Blood Donation Center and six donors have given convalescent plasma in Montana. Combined, the Idaho/Montana region has collected 154 convalescent plasma units.

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Screeners: More volunteers needed

In his role as a donor ambassador, Fry answers donors’ questions, gets them a snack afterwards and makes sure they have a good experience. Sometimes Red Cross blood drives are held in locations that are like a natural fit for Kenneth, a long-time blood donor himself.

“When I was working with the railroad, if it was in the off-hours on the day of a Red Cross blood drive, I donated,” he said, adding that the Red Cross staff he became familiar with often mentioned volunteer opportunities that might interest him after he retired.

“Eventually they had turned their blood donation into an ambassador role. Now, each day I volunteer I show up to the drives a bit early to set up the goodies table with water, cookies and treats. …

Though I do the prescreening outside, I do save myself a few cookies for the end of the day to take home.”

Before these enhanced safety precautions were put in place because of COVID-19, Kenneth spent his entire volunteer shift in the donation area, seated at the goodie table talking with fellow volunteers and thanking each donor.

An admitted “workaholic” before retirement, the divorced Pocatello railroad worker has three adult sons between the ages of 30 and 40. “My kids are grown, and I just have to keep active,” he said. “I love to talk to people, all kinds of people. It comes from being a G.I. kid who has seen all 50 states and lived in all kinds of countries (while) growing up.”

To stay even more involved with his community, he also volunteers with the Operation Lifesaver group at the railroad tracks. However, his busiest volunteer commitment is with the Red Cross. Because of his rewarding experience with the organization, he encourages others to volunteer there as well.

“It’s a great way to meet people and have great conversations during each day,” he said.

Join the team

To learn more about becoming a Red Cross volunteer health screener or blood donor ambassador, visit redcross.org/volunteer, send an email to KIMT.merchandising@redcross.org or call Nate Gilbert at 208-488-5231. Volunteers for these positions are needed in both Idaho and Montana.

Help inventory client assistance cards

The fourth-quarter inventory of client assistance cards and mission cards typically takes place June 1-12. It’s crucial for Red Cross to keep an accurate record of all cards issued to volunteers and staff in the field.

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If you are a DCs worker who does not carry these cards, please still complete the form indicating you do not hold cards. Cards that are not reported will be electronically destroyed shortly after the form closes on June 12 so our fiscal year can be closed out by June 30.

If you will not have access to your cards between June 1 and June 12, please contact Angela James at angela.la@redcross.org prior to June 1 so your cards can be counted within the reporting window.

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To hear more from Fry and why she donates, check out this video.

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