

# DISASTERCOM

DERA Newsletter

40 Years of Service

July 2002



## Workshop Rescheduled

**New Dates: November 13-15, 2002**

**DERA's Strategic Planning Workshop and 40th Anniversary Membership Meeting, previously scheduled for August 22-23 in Denver has been rescheduled for November 13-15, 2002.**

DERA will now host the membership meeting on November 13-15, 2002, in Denver, Colorado.

The original dates were to coincide with the Colorado Governor's Conference on Emergency Management. The Governor's office cancelled that conference just as our final announcement of the workshop had been mailed to members.

At the same time, many of our workshop facilitators and key members were asking to cancel their participation in the August events because of emergency response commitments on several large disaster operations including western states' wildfires and other contingency deployments.

"The rescheduled workshop will allow us to maintain the original focus and intent of the event," said Robert R. Dockery, Chairman of the Board. "No one wanted to reschedule the workshop on such short notice, but there weren't many other practical choices."

The November workshop will be held at the Holiday Inn, Denver West, and will include several additions to the program, including a full day of optional field exercises on Friday. Scenarios for the field exercises will be chemical, biological and radiological terrorist events.

Other highlights of the workshop are briefings on national infrastructure preparedness by CPTI and issue panels on re-

sponse challenges in the areas of communications, information technology and management, search and rescue and incident command.

In addition to top-level presentations and panel discussions, a main focus of the workshop will be for the membership to participate in small workshop sessions to outline the *DERA 2050—Strategic Vision Plan*.

"This workshop will provide our membership the opportunity to set DERA's course for the distant future," according to Dr. Marian Olsen, senior member of the Board. "We are looking for the best ideas and the toughest challenges from our membership. This organization truly belongs to its membership, and they need to tell us where it should be headed."

A block of rooms has been reserved at the Holiday Inn for attendees. Several tours and social events are scheduled.

Three Dell Latitude Xpi notebook computers will be awarded as door prizes at the workshop.

DERA will mail a new conference brochure to members in the next few weeks and will post updated information to our web site as it becomes available. For the latest information, members should check:

**[www.disasters.org/workshop.htm](http://www.disasters.org/workshop.htm)**

## Student Awards

Colorado's El Pomar Youth in Community Service Foundation has presented DERA with \$2,500 in additional grants to help fund our awards program for students who conduct studies in emergency preparedness.

Students at several Colorado High Schools voted to award DERA the funds to support our program.

DERA presents certificates, medals and small cash awards to students who perform studies on community safety, disaster preparedness, emergency management or similar topics. While most studies are undertaken as part of science projects, that is not a requirement to receive an award.

Any DERA member, school teacher, youth leader or emergency service professional can nominate a student for award by sending DERA a letter giving specific details about the student's work.

Group awards are available. Recently, our member and local emergency manager Tim Billingsley of Columbiana, Alabama coordinated the presentation of 160 certificates to students who had worked on community and family preparedness projects as part of a program he had developed in cooperation with the local schools. He also presented a special DERA award certificate to 7th Grade teacher Vickie Swann, who had worked with the Columbiana Office of Emergency Management to develop the project.

"I am deeply grateful to the El Pomar Foundation and to the high school students of Colorado who have seen the potential of our awards program," said DERA Trustee Steve Keene in a recent news release announcing awards for the upcoming school term. "Last Spring, students from Buena Vista and Summit County provided us with \$750 in seed money and this year students from Trademark Learning Center in Greeley, Golden High School, Sterling High School and Adams City High School contributed \$2,500."

"We're depending on DERA members to nominate deserving students," Keene said.

**DisasterCom** is the quarterly newsletter of DERA International. News items and articles are always welcome.

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Editor: (Vacant after this issue — Applications Invited)

Membership in this Nonprofit Association is open to all who share our commitment to effective disaster preparedness and response. See Back Page for Membership Application

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## DERA International

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DERA is a Nonprofit, U.S. IRS 501(c)(3) Disaster Service and Professional Association  
Established in 1962  
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# E I I P



## Director's Comments

Dear Members,

I want to apologize to each of you for the inconvenience caused by rescheduling our workshop. Please know that the conference committee worked hard to find a way not to make this change. Nevertheless, I do believe we will have a better and more productive session despite the change. We were able to schedule one extra day in November, which we couldn't in August because of joint sessions, and the full day of field exercises should provide a valuable experience for those who are able to participate.

I also need to explain to you why our organization's level of service and responsiveness to member requests has been less than desirable since December.

As you know, DERA has never had any paid staff. Everyone working on DERA projects is—and always has been—an unpaid volunteer, including the executive director.

Beginning in 1995, we started using student aides and interns to handle many of the administrative tasks of the DERA office...such as preparing membership cards, answering emails from members, updating our mailing list, sending out welcome packets, and the like. It was a good arrangement. DERA got some much needed (and very skilled) labor, and the students got some challenging work assignments, nice letters of recommendation, and in some cases, academic credit for their work.

All that changed abruptly near the end of 2001 when our insurance carrier, along with the entire insurance industry, gave us a choice: To either stop using student aides under the age of 21 or face a dramatic increase in our liability insurance premiums. While DERA had never experienced any problems with student aides or their adult supervisors—nor were we likely to, given our policy of two adults being present whenever students were working, and the fact that many of the students were family members of our adult volunteers. Nevertheless, all of us who work with youth are aware of horrific instances of abuse that have destroyed the lives of many and ruined the organizations involved. Reluctantly, we terminated our student aide program in November 2001 and began asking our adult volunteers for more help.

My own involvement with DERA nearly ended at 6:30 p.m. on December 13th. My mother had died in North Carolina and my family and I were driving from Colorado to attend her funeral and close out her affairs. We had a serious automobile accident just as we crossed the state line on I-40 from Tennessee to North Carolina. Despite a treacherous accident scene, countless good people stopped to help us. Dozens of individuals put their lives at serious risk to help strangers in need. The fire-rescue crews from Clyde, North Carolina and EMTs from the Haywood County Ambulance Service took good care of us, as did staff at the Haywood Regional Hospital.

Chairman of the DERA Board, Bob Dockery, his wife Pat, and Paul Yeager (W4SKI), president of WCARS, came to our aid at the hospital and helped in so many ways...not the least of which was to secure the remains of our belongings from the wreckage, and put together a sup-

port system for us. Jeanne Culpepper (my wife's mother) and her husband, Cecil, had just arrived in Asheville at the time of the accident, and the Dockerys somehow located them and brought them to the hospital to be with us. Kathy, Kevin and I survived what statistically should have been a fatal accident.

The accident, however, left me with considerable impairment. Since December, I have been unable to work regularly, either at my "day job" or here as a volunteer.

The result for DERA has been that important work in just about every area of activity has been delayed. Membership cards for 2002 didn't get out (remember, we lost our student aides just before the accident) and even reminders of past due dues are still in the backlog.

I've asked the Board of Directors to find a replacement executive director at the earliest date so the organization can get back on track.

All this underscores the importance of the strategic planning workshop in Denver this coming November. I ask every one of you to make a special effort to attend. The membership needs to seriously consider the kind of future it wants for this organization. We can continue to operate as a volunteer-run activity...with occasional bumps and disruptions like you've experienced these past months (but at a lower cost of membership because no salaries are paid)... or we can look at other, more reliable alternatives for office support—such as hiring a professional staff (but with a direct increase in cost). That decision needs to be yours.

More importantly, however, is the opportunity the upcoming workshop will give you to literally shape the future of DERA. What roles and missions do you see for us in 25 to 50 years? Should we continue to be a membership organization? Do we want to be involved in response missions, or is there another mission we should undertake?

Please attend the workshop in November and help decide these and other issues. I hope to see you there.

- Jay Wilson, Executive Director

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