

Relief worker shares credit

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BEN LOMOND — Mary Hammer is modest about being flown to Washington to be awarded for her relief work in the aftermath of the Loma Prieta earthquake.

"I would just as soon that the money for the flight be given to earthquake victims," says Hammer, "I represent all the volunteers who spent hours and hours working — no person can do very much alone."

The Federal Emergency Management Agency is recognizing Hammer, director of Valley Resource Center, and Annette Marcum, director of Valley Churches United, with Outstanding Public Service Awards in Washington on Feb 21.

When the quake struck, Valley neighborhoods were well-prepared to respond thanks to an emergency network built by Hammer after the devastating floods and mudslides of 1982.

Her survival network puts emergency food, water, generators, radios, first aid and able-bodied volunteers within walking distance of Valley residents in need. Her plan divides the Valley communities into 53 sectors. Individual households in the sectors fill out survival cards listing what they are willing to contribute in an emergency. The information is kept on file in a personal computer.

"In this commuter society, people don't communicate with each other," Hammer notes, "With each disaster comes a growing awareness of the need to get to know each other."

"We must be responsible for ourselves," says Hammer. "We have made a choice to live in a mountain community," a community easily cut off from the rest of the county.

The neighborhood survival plan "worked wonderfully" during the quake, says Hammer. FEMA officials agree.

Two hours after the quake, Hammer opened a shelter at St. Michael's Church in Boulder Creek and housed 40 people the first night. Among other activities, she organized volunteer carpenters to help the elderly and others to repair damaged homes.

A resident of Boulder Creek, the 52-year-old Hammer grew up in Alameda, and spent childhood summers in Brookdale. Her grandfather built a cabin there from a single redwood tree, she says.

She met her husband, Joe Hammer, while they were both teaching school to American military children in Europe. The couple returned to California in 1966, and later adopted two children.

"This seemed like a perfect area, quiet, a nice place to raise kids," says Hammer.

"But the peacefulness has disappeared," she laughs, referring to the forest fire, flood and earthquake threats to her community these last seven years.

"I don't think there's a community in the U.S. that's had to face something like that."

The sunny, energetic woman isn't taking the FEMA award as a signal to relax. Her program is in the process of moving from the crowded headquarters on Highway 9 and Mill Street, a former gas station, to 231



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Mary Hammer worked quickly after the quake.

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Main St., across from the post office.

"This is interim," says Hammer between nonstop phone calls to her office, "We are looking for a larger space — I don't know how that's going to come."

The new office will bring a host of service agencies to San Lorenzo Valley residents on a "time-sharing" basis. "We have about 49,000 people here in the San Lorenzo Valley," says Hammer, "and social service agencies were only available in Santa Cruz." The organizations will provide job training, women's support, nutrition, chemical dependency counseling, and other services.

With the telephone ringing again, Hammer looks forward for a moment to a summer vacation after this busy year.

"I take off during the summers and go fishing," Hammer says longingly. "It's quiet and there's no phone."