

## **Not My Fault: Honoring Linda Nellist, A Humboldt preparedness heroine**

Lori Dengler/For the Times-Standard  
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Last week, the Redwood Coast Tsunami Work Group recognized Linda Nellist's thirty-five years of preparedness work on the North Coast with its Community Leadership Award. Prodding individuals, families, businesses, and communities to take actions to prepare for earthquakes, fires, floods, tsunamis or other disasters is often a thankless job. This is my opportunity to stand up and cheer for all that Linda has done in training, outreach and education to keep us safe.

I first met Linda during the aftermath of the 1992 Cape Mendocino earthquake, when she was an assistant in the Humboldt County OES Office. Those were pretty heady days. We were experiencing daily aftershocks, there was much concern and confusion about the small tsunami that it produced, national media was camped out everywhere and there were groups of scientists pouring into town to conduct reconnaissance efforts. Throughout it all, Linda was the one person I could always count on to be calm and unruffled. Two years later she became the county OES Director, a post she would hold until 1987.

The Cape Mendocino earthquakes weren't the only disaster Linda dealt with while at OES. Setting up FEMA assistance centers became almost second nature in the floods of 1986, '96 and '97 plus a few winter storms and another earthquake. There are plusses when a federal disaster declaration is made – the assistance funds are very helpful to affected communities. But there is also a downside with the headaches of coordinating local – state – federal needs and goals. It was Linda's job to try to make sure the effort best met the needs of the affected communities. Not an easy task.

Linda recognized early on that preparedness was the key to improving resilience in a rural county like Humboldt with population centers separated by bridges and rugged terrain that can easily become isolated in earthquakes and winter storms. In the aftermath of the '92 quake, Linda was able to secure a state grant for emergency education. She researched what was available and decided the Neighborhood Emergency Services Team (NEST) concept was best for our region. NEST trained

communities to self organize – to identify the skills of the local people and helped them organize to help themselves. Linda spent countless hours working with neighborhoods big and small to increase awareness, identify local expertise and the how tos of emergency plans and supplies.

Post '92 earthquake funds were also used to publish the first edition of our Living on Shaky Ground earthquake-tsunami magazine. Linda was a member of the advisory group and provided much of the meat of the preparedness section. She was also a great editor, finding numerous typos and inconsistencies that I read right through.

The 1992 earthquake had a magnitude of 7.2. It was on a fault related to the Cascadia subduction zone and was a mini-version of what a larger Cascadia quake might produce. With California State expertise and federal funding, a study was compiled on how a bigger Cascadia quake would affect us. "Planning Scenario in Humboldt and Del Norte Counties, California for a Great Earthquake on the Cascadia Subduction Zone" was published in 1995 and was the only state study to include the effects of a tsunami as well as strong shaking. And who was our county liaison to the scientific team? Linda Nellist of course.

The 1995 Scenario was an eye opener for those of us who had only paid attention to the hazards of tsunamis coming to us from far away. The modeling at the time was crude and later studies have greatly improved the assessment of our tsunami threat, but the 1995 study made it clear that we had a problem and education was the best way to address it.

So in July of 1996, a group of nine people from Del Norte and Humboldt County had an informal meeting to talk about how best to address the Cascadia earthquake and tsunami threat. They decided to form an ad hoc group to identify what was needed to develop and promote coordinate and consistent preparedness programs for the region. I missed that meeting but Linda was there.

This was the beginning of the Redwood Coast Tsunami Work Group, an organization that continues to grow and thrive nearly twenty-three years later. In the early days, there was very little information about our tsunami hazard and how best to plan for a tsunami generated just off our coast. Linda has been with us every step of the way. In 1999, the Work Group inaugurated the Earthquake-Tsunami Room at the Humboldt County Fair.

Linda helped develop displays and staff the room every year since then.

After leaving OES, she spent years as Community Education Director for Humboldt County American Red Cross. In 2012, Linda was co-founder of the CERT Community Emergency Response Team) Regional Training Center at HSU, and she continues to be a leader in Humboldt County CERT efforts. She helped to train the last cohort of Humboldt County CERT group this last February.

No matter what the project, Linda has always given 200% of herself – whether it is teaching a class, organizing a workshop, giving presentations or cleaning up the kitchen after other guests have left. She epitomizes what the RCTWG Community Service Award represents – tireless commitment to improving the safety and resilience of the North Coast.

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Lori Dengler is an emeritus professor of geology at Humboldt State University, an expert in tsunami and earthquake hazards. Questions or comments about this column, or want a free copy of the preparedness magazine “Living on Shaky Ground”? Leave a message at (707) 826-6019 or email Kamome@humboldt.edu <http://www.times-standard.com/opinion/20180516/lori-dengler-honoring-linda-nellist-a-humboldt-county-preparedness-heroine>