

PACIFIC ADA CENTER  
ADA NATIONAL NETWORK LEARNING SESSION  
FEMA PROMISING PRACTICE: INCLUSIVE EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT  
PRACTICES IN VERMONT

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>> **Lewis Kraus:** Welcome to the Emergency Management and Preparedness - Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities Series. I'm Lewis Kraus from the Pacific ADA Center, your moderator for this series. This series of webinars is brought to you by the Pacific ADA Center as a collaborative effort between the ADA National Network and FEMA's Office of Disability Integration and Coordination.

The ADA National Network is made up of 10 regional centers that are federally funded to provide training, technical assistance, and other information as needed on the Americans with Disabilities Act. You can reach your regional ADA Center by dialing 1-800-949-4232. FEMA's Office of Disability and coordination covers the same 10 regions with regional disability integration specialists. More information about FEMA can be found at [www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov). Then type in ODIC into the FEMA website search.

This is the third year of the webinar series which shares issues and promising practices in emergency management inclusive of people with disabilities and others with access and functional needs. The webinars provide an opportunity for emergency managers, people with disabilities, and others with access and functional needs, first responders, planners, community organizations, and other community partners to exchange knowledge and information on promising practices in inclusive emergency preparedness and management for the whole community.

The series topics will cover emergency preparedness and disaster response, recovery and mitigation, as well as accessibility and reasonable accommodation issues under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with

Disabilities Act of 1990, the ADA, and other relevant laws. The series alternates monthly between ADA National Network Learning Sessions and FEMA Promising Practices.

We encourage you to review the series website and familiarize yourself with the full array of new sessions available in this series at [www.adapresentations.org/schedule.php](http://www.adapresentations.org/schedule.php). These monthly webinars occur on the second Thursday of the month at 2:30 eastern time, 1:30 central time, 12:30 mountain time, and 11:30 a.m. Pacific time. By being here you are on the list to receive notices for future webinars in this series. The notices go out two to three weeks before the next webinar and open the webinar to registration.

For those of you who are new to this webinar series and its software, we will now review some of the features of the webinar platform before we begin the session today.

Next slide.

In this session, only the speakers will have audio. You can follow along with the webinar platform with the slides. If you're not using the webinar platform, you can download a copy of today's webinar presentation at [www.adapresentations.org/schedule.php](http://www.adapresentations.org/schedule.php) website.

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This session is being recorded and an archive will be available for review early next week at the website along with the PowerPoint slides.

There is captioning. And you will be able to get captioning using the CC button in the audio and video window at the top.

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At the conclusion of today's presentation, there will be an opportunity for everyone to ask questions. You may submit your questions using the chat area within the webinar platform. Speakers and I will address them at the end of the session. Feel free to submit them as they come to your mind during the presentation.

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Now, next slide.

Today's FEMA Promising Practice session is titled Inclusive Emergency Management Practices in Vermont. On August 28, 2011, the State of Vermont was devastated by Tropical Storm Irene, resulting in several deaths, hundreds of homes destroyed, over a thousand Vermonters displaced, damage to hundreds of businesses and farms and thousands of roads and bridges being washed out. In the aftermath of this historic natural disaster and with funding made possible by the Vermont Department of Public Safety, Disability Rights Vermont and the

Vermont and New Hampshire Valley Region of the American Red Cross worked collaboratively to survey emergency shelters for accessibility and develop emergency planning processes inclusive of people with disabilities and others with access and functional needs in disaster planning, preparedness, response, relief, and recovery efforts. Disability Rights Vermont also provided eight two-hour trainings to 45 Red Cross volunteers and approximately 25 Community Emergency Response Team, CERT, volunteers on the ADA, disability etiquette, and assisting individuals with disabilities during times of disaster.

The information presented in this webinar is intended solely as informal guidance and is neither a determination of legal rights or responsibilities by NIDILRR or FEMA.

We should be on the slide with our speakers.

Our speakers today are A.J. Ruben, a Supervising Attorney at Disability Rights Vermont, DRVT, since 2002. He and his family live in a rural town in Vermont that was cut off from the rest of the state for eight days during Tropical Storm Irene in 2011 and he has worked with DRVT on emergency planning and preparedness issues for people with disabilities ever since.

Tina Wood has been a Senior Investigator/Paralegal with DVRT since 2000 and works mostly within the prisons in Vermont investigating abuse and neglect allegations and advocating on behalf of the prisoners with disabilities. She has over 15 years of experience volunteering in varying local emergency

management roles and currently is a Red Cross Disaster Liaison to the State Emergency Operations Center.

Michelle Bishop is a Disability Advocacy Specialist at the National Disability Rights Network, NDRN, and in her role at NDRN Michelle provides training and technical assistance to the National Protection & Advocacy Network including DRVT on inclusive emergency preparedness. She also works collaboratively with NDRN's MOU/MOA partners, FEMA and the Red Cross.

So, I will turn it over to you, A.J., Tina, Michelle.

>> A.J. Ruben: Thank you very much. This is A.J. Ruben from Vermont. We're really happy to be here and talk about the experience we've had in Vermont during this emergency disaster planning work. I imagine most of the people on the call are familiar with the P&A system and we are the Vermont Protection & Advocacy system to advocate for the rights of people with disabilities in our state.

The Congress created the P&A systems in large part to make sure that there was increased scrutiny and protections for people with disabilities because sometimes the states themselves weren't able to assure that people with disabilities would be free from abuse and neglect. So we carry out that responsibility here in Vermont. And certainly the way people with disabilities are treated and the access they have to services during emergencies and disasters is very important to us. And we learn that even more importantly during the big storm, Irene, in 2011 that we'll talk more about in a couple of minutes.

>> **Tina Wood:** Thank you, everybody, for joining us. This is Tina Wood. I want to give a little bit of background leading up to the project that we're working on now.

DRVT's work in the emergency planning field started years before this particular project that we'll be discussing today. For years I have worked on a program in the remote area of Vermont affectionately known as the Northeast Kingdom, the three northeast counties in Vermont. DRVT, Disability Rights Vermont, along with other agencies and first responders, serving those communities created a process by which individuals with disabilities and functional needs could sign up on a registry to receive help in the event of a disaster. This registry was specific to the type of functional need or disability that a person may have, public education in disaster preparedness for individuals was another component emphasized in this process. And we worked very collaboratively with local agencies, state agencies, first responders in the Red Cross.

It took probably about three or four years -- it's been a process going on in Vermont for many years, different areas of the state trying different programs. We were one of the first areas to come up with such a program. And as a result, Governor Douglas, Agency of Human Services, in May of 2008 awarded our group an award called the Vermont Aging Program Champion Award for the work and efforts that we put into that planning. So that was really a large part of getting started in emergency planning work for Disability Rights Vermont.

I have also been involved in reaching out to nursing homes and residential care homes who are required to have disaster plans. We offer our services to them in creating or updating their disaster plans. And I have actually done a few of those and it has turned out very well.

So this was the beginning of DRVT's partnerships and has led to the project that we're going to be talking about today.

So how and why did this project start? In 2011, it was a very tough year for Vermont. The National Weather Service reported that from March 2011 through May 2011 over 24-inches of rain fell across Vermont, across the Central and Northern Vermont with 28.29-inches on the highest peak during this three-month period. So coupled with the melting snowpack from the winter, we experienced heavy flooding in the spring of 2011.

As timing would have it, our national organization, the National Disability Rights Network, was reaching out to all the P&As about becoming more involved in emergency planning for people with disabilities in trying to seek out funding through state channels if possible, to assist us with planning efforts. There had been more of an emphasis nationally on this type of work after Hurricane Katrina.

So I began to establish meetings with the Red Cross leadership in Vermont to discuss ways to collaborate on planning issues to which they were very responsive. Having those relationships in place is a huge part of why I feel we have been so successful in this work.

Early in June 2011, kind of following up on having a lot of severe flooding in May, in June DRVT received a complaint from a community member about their experience in a Red Cross shelter. To my knowledge, it's the first time we have ever received a complaint about a Red Cross shelter.

So I was assigned to investigate that given my knowledge of shelter operations. And it was apparent after speaking to the individual involved and speaking to the Red Cross volunteers and finding out what had happened that it really just boiled down to a lack of effective communication between the volunteers and the person who was residing in the shelter. So as a result of that complaint and my discussions with the Red Cross leadership, we brainstormed and came up with creating a disability etiquette training for volunteers and also conducting accessibility surveys of our shelters in Vermont, pairing those two things together seemed like a really good fit.

The Red Cross does look at accessibility issues when they're doing their initial agreements with shelter locations. And I know that being a Red Cross volunteer. I had done many of those in the past. But at the time it was not surveyed based to the extent that our proposed surveys would be. We'll discuss that in more detail as we go along.

**>> A.J. Ruben:** This is A.J. again. It can't really be overemphasized how important it was for our office to have Tina Wood on the payroll because she had been working for so many years in the Red Cross and she had worked her way up from the volunteer, beginning volunteer, to someone who has really given a lot of responsibility and leadership.

Sorry about that background noise.

So when we decided to get involved in emergency planning and the etiquette training for shelter workers, having someone on staff who had years and years of experience working with those same people from their perspective was very, very important. So I asked each of you who are working at P&As to think about who on your staff is already involved in the emergency sheltering or emergency preparedness activities in your state. And if no one is, it's something to consider asking someone to volunteer in. Because relationships and trusts were really important to get our message in and they could be effective.

>> **Tina Wood:** So a few months following the rains and the flooding that we had in May of 2011 and then coincidentally just 17 days before Tropical Storm Irene hit Vermont in August of 2011, DRVT was asked to speak at a state-wide news conference with Governor Shumlin and others in support of the need for the functional needs support trailers that the Red Cross had received funds from the state to purchase.

For people who are not familiar with those trailers, they include items such as wheelchairs, crutches, walkers, and canes, shower seats, transfer benches, ramps, privacy screens, geriatric beds, accessible cots, and medical kits. And geriatric beds, for people who are not familiar, are beds designed to hold people who are obese and they are more than the accessible cots.

So this was the first time DRVT and the Red Cross jointly addressed the public. In my view it solidified our partnership and goal towards emergency planning for individuals with disabilities and functional needs.

>> **A.J. Ruben:** So 17 days later -- actually, that's a picture of Tina in front of the rig. 17 days later on August 28, as you can see from this picture, Vermont got hit by Tropical Storm Irene. It was a big shock for us because no one had forecast such massive flooding. It was a very kind of light, steady rain the day before and no one expected what happened. As you can see from this picture and some others we'll show you, the devastation was very severe in our very rural state. As Tina mentioned, or Lewis mentioned earlier, many towns were shut off, no way in or out on road for days and days and days. So we knew at that point that DRVT had to be involved in making sure people with disabilities were not abused and neglected in the aftermath of the storm.

>> **Tina Wood:** So in the aftermath of Irene, Vermont's damage was very severe, as you can see from this slide on the screen. The day before Irene, the -- Vermont prepared by opening 13 large shelters, five of which closed the day after since there was no damage in those specific locations from Irene.

I was actually waiting out the storm in a shelter in St. Johnsbury, we had opened that one. Fortunately that area of the state was not as hard hit as other areas of the state but several small towns in Vermont asked for help and sheltering immediately following Irene; that they were physically cut off due to flooding and road damage, and volunteers were simply not able to reach them.

>> **A.J. Ruben:** One of the other sort of major impacts of the flood, as you can see from this photograph, is that our State Hospital, our state psychiatric hospital, was flooded out. At the time it held about 55 patients who had to be evacuated in the middle of the night, many of them on the backs of staff through waist-deep water.

What was also interesting about this part of the storm is that the complex of buildings that housed our Vermont State Hospital also housed our State Emergency Operations Center and it got flooded as well and had to be moved. So there was just a lot of damage to the infrastructure that we usually rely on to help protect folks during these disasters, not the least of which was the State Hospital which no longer was able to take any patients and they all had to be relocated to local hospitals and other facilities.

And this is a picture of the destruction in the town close to where I live. You can see that getting cars in and out of Killington, Vermont, was not possible for some time. Hundreds of miles of roads were damaged like this. And yet there were people with disabilities living in all of these communities that needed support and had to get services to them. So we realized that it was very important for us to be part of the solution and to collaborate with the emergency services in Vermont.

>> **Tina Wood:** So like A.J. was talking about, what could we do? In the weeks following Tropical Storm Irene, I participated in weekly conference calls which were led by a FEMA disability integration specialist and included members of state agencies and others from the disability community in Vermont. The focus

of these conference calls was to identify and address any disaster-related needs for Vermonters with disabilities that were going unmet or were having difficulty in being solved as a result of the storm.

For me, personally, it was really great to hear all the work being done by individual agencies and it really brought out some cohesiveness to the chaos of who was doing what that can often erupt in the aftermath of a disaster. So these phone calls, the first time I had participated in phone calls to that nature, and I think it was a really great addition to Vermont's response to this disaster.

During the days following Irene I was also able to spend a few days in the relocated state OEC, which as A.J. alluded to, was flooded and had to be relocated temporarily in another city. So that gave me a whole new perspective of I'm able to do the Red Cross volunteer work but then also go be the Red Cross liaison in the State Emergency Operations Center and can see that side of things and how decisions are being made.

In the aftermath of this historic and natural disaster, Disability Rights Vermont submitted a grant request to the Vermont Department of Public Safety in October of 2011, just a few months after Irene. With the support of the Vermont-New Hampshire Valley Region of the American Red Cross. It was to focus on the accessibility of Vermont's shelters and to provide disability etiquette training to Red Cross volunteers and other first responders.

>> **A.J. Ruben:** And then this is just a picture of one of the houses in my town, in Pittsfield. What's nice about that disaster picture is just the story. The couple

that lived there with their two dogs were rescued by a human chain moments before that house got picked up off its foundation and moved about 50 yards downstream, so narrowly averted a big loss of life there. But just another example of how devastating the storm was to us in Vermont.

>> **Tina Wood:** So the importance of planning for the whole community, including those with disabilities and functional needs in the road to recovery. As Red Cross volunteers, we're taught that the recovery process begins immediately following the disaster, when individuals are placed in shelters. That shelter is the starting point for recovery and access to goods and services is essential.

When I first started these trainings, one comment that would come up when we discussed planning was this. So, all right, during emergency situations you can't always have everything perfect and people with disabilities need to take whatever help they can get, like if a person uses a wheelchair, that person can be carried into the shelter if the entrance is not accessible. So my response was, yes, during times of true disaster when things are unfolding rapidly, sometimes you do what has to be done to make sure everyone is safe. However with that said, the emphasis should be on preparation and knowing which shelters in advance are accessible. If it's not, how to fix or plan for those barriers in advance so that an individual who uses a wheelchair can maintain their independence and dignity just as everyone else can during that disaster. It's all about the planning. And that would be the point that I would try to convey to the people taking the training.

So, again, we've already touched on the focus of our project was, you know, are Vermont shelters prepared. Can we accommodate individuals with disabilities? And how knowledgeable are our volunteers and emergency responders about the Americans with Disabilities Act and how that applies to services they might provide in shelters?

>> **A.J. Ruben:** So just again to reiterate the fact that we were able to be involved and have credibility with the emergency management folks mostly because we had on staff Tina who had been working with them for many, many years and was known and respected by them. So I just can't emphasize enough how important it is for those of us with experience in disability rights and accommodations to start building working relationships with those folks who are involved in emergency planning and disaster preparedness, including the volunteers who are working for the Red Cross. The more those kinds of relationships we have, the easier it's going to be to get in before the disaster strikes to help prepare. And when the disaster occurs and you might hear of complaints, having a relationship preexisting with the folks who are running the shelters will help a lot to resolve the individual persons with the disabilities concerns at the moment. So try hard to find people on your staff who can work in both worlds, the disability rights movement and the emergency planning movement.

>> **Tina Wood:** So this just gives you a quick look at Vermont's profile. I'm not sure who all is listening in but I'm sure we have many different states represented. Vermont is a very small state, which worked in our favor of doing this type of work.

For Red Cross shelters in Vermont, I just want to put this in relation to the project that we're working on because it's all about surveying the shelters. I'll give a little definition of what these are and an explanation in a moment.

The first step of our project was to look at how many designated Red Cross shelters there were in Vermont. There are a lot but probably not as many compared to larger states. Vermont has roughly just under 400 shelter locations.

The second step was to decide which shelters should be done first. The challenge in some of the scheduling is that typically the primary shelter in Vermont towns is the local school, whether it's the elementary school, middle school or high school. So school day schedules had to be taken into account so as not to disrupt the student life when planning to do a survey. And when I do these surveys it typically takes anywhere from an hour to two hours. So I tried to conduct the school surveys during scheduled vacation days or in-service days when students were not there just to avoid interruptions. That seemed to work well.

I initially started with the eight regional shelters that we have in Vermont. Those are the largest shelters. And then I randomly selected locations after that based on how many I could do in a certain funding cycle. The other typical shelter locations are either town halls or municipal buildings.

The third step in the project was creating a disability etiquette training that incorporated individuals – incorporating assisting individuals with disabilities and

shelters. It was something unique. So I had to do some research and use information that I found from a variety of sources to create a two-hour training. This training has been very well received with the Red Cross volunteers and the CERT volunteers. And CERT is Community Emergency Response Team -- I was asked to -- the word has started to trickle out a little bit about the trainings.

And then the fourth step in the process was to create a report format by which we could report out any ADA standard violations that we found while doing the surveys. And that report form I'll discuss further on in the presentation.

The Red Cross shelters. So we have regular shelters -- we have about 300 of those which are identified as sites that can be opened upon need and they're traditional shelters. The RERP shelters, the Radiological Emergency Response Plan, is centered around the nuclear power plant in Vernon, Vermont. There are 24 large shelters in Central and Northern Vermont designed to hold up to 6,000 people.

The LDSI, or Local Disaster Shelter Initiative, there's 65 approximately of those. And these are small, 25-person shelters in each town for which the town has the equipment and trained town volunteers to open the shelter themselves. And that actually came as a result of initiative from Irene where, like I said before, towns were cut off and volunteers could not actually get into them. So this local disaster shelter initiative was designed to make towns self-sufficient in the event that another disaster came and rescuers couldn't get in or volunteers couldn't get in soon enough.

And then the regional shelters, which are the eight largest shelters in Vermont. They're designed to be opened within the first 72 hours of an event. And they provide services to residents of groups of communities. So they're open to not just a single town but to neighboring towns who come in.

So, so far we have a lot of work to do still. 47 surveys have been conducted of the approximately just under 400. So still have a lot of work to do.

And just to give you a sampling of some of the types and frequency of violation that we've seen from these surveys, usually the biggest offenders are parking and restrooms. That's where we typically see the most violations.

A sample of the nine violations were the accessible parking spaces serving the shelter were not on the shortest accessible route to the entrance. So that's nine out of 36. 20 out of 36 related to having no access aisles adjacent to parking spaces. 26 violations related to not having adequate signage for accessible restrooms. 21 violations related to lack of insulation on drain and hot water pipes in accessible restrooms. And then 11 violations were an outside accessible route had an abrupt level change which would cause possibly a tripping hazard for someone with a disability. Plus it's kind of a small sampling. But the Department of Public Safety also recognizes the importance of our work and is equally committed and has been a great partner with us. To that end, they have reached out to our office to continue funding when available so that we can continue the work of surveying all of the shelters and training all of the volunteers. But we clearly still have a lot of work to do.

These next few slides will just give you an idea about the surveys to prepare for the surveys, what documents we used. The first one is the "Guidance on Planning for Integration of Functional Needs Support Services in General Population Shelters." This is a document put out by FEMA. On the screen you'll see there's a link to it if you want to look at it. This document was kind of the foundation for our work and how we got -- what I used to get started.

In this document we had started out -- there's a checklist in here that was developed by the Department of Justice in collaboration with the Red Cross and FEMA. It is one I used to outline my reports. But just know that the DOJ checklist is outdated as far as it cites the 1999 ADA standards. So you'll want to look at the 2010 standards. I'll show you that link in a minute.

And I just want to highlight for people who may not be familiar with the definition -- I throw out a lot of terms here -- the definition of functional needs support services means -- it's on page 8 of this document if you download it or want to look at it. The services that enable individuals to maintain their independence in general population shelter. And this can include reasonable modifications to policies, practices, and procedures, durable medical equipment, consumable medical supplies, personal assistant services, and other goods and services as needed.

So children and adults requiring functional needs support services may have physical, sensory, mental health, and cognitive or intellectual disabilities affecting their ability to function independently without assistance. And then others may benefit from functional needs support services that may include

women in the late stages of pregnancy, elders, and people needing geriatric equipment.

As I was just talking about with the standards, this is the actual updated 2010 ADA Standards. So this is the document that you should be referencing. Mine is full of all sorts of fun colors and tabs and is really my lifeline when I'm writing these reports. The link to that is also on here so that you can access that later.

This is the newer checklist that we have been using. Again, the site is there if you would like to use that.

So our reports. We generate a report after we're done each accessibility survey. This is just -- you can see on the screen this is our cover page. Our reports are formatted to follow the checklist outlines. Only ADA deficiencies are noted. We don't know -- not what's good but we don't note anything that's in compliance because then obviously the report would just be really, really long. So we just cite the things that are not in compliance. And we give examples and suggestions on how they can make things come into compliance, either temporary or permanent solutions.

Pictures are an essential part of doing these surveys, and documentation. The picture can offer a better part of the reporting process for a clearer explanation of the standard and then other than the standard language. The language at times is very confusing so having a picture to look at, like they say, is worth a thousand words.

Like I said, we provide temporary and permanent solutions. So when we're done this report, it is provided to the facility that we surveyed. It's provided to the Department of Public Safety. And it's also provided to the Red Cross office.

>> *A.J. Ruben*: So one of the issues that we ran into earlier on with these reports is a concern that the facility might use these reports as proof that they were compliant with the ADA architectural requirements, Section 504 of the Rehab Act requirements, and we didn't want to be in that position. We weren't holding ourselves out as the, you know, final word on whether or not the door was the correct weight or the beveling on the threshold was the correct beveling. So one of the important aspects of these reports is that there's a caveat or a disclosure towards the back of the report that basically warns the recipients that our office is not warranting or guaranteeing that if they make the repairs or the alteration that we've suggested, that they'll be free from any liability for violating accessibility standards.

Instead, we are clear in these reports to indicate that these are our ideas and our understanding of where there might be violations but that they should -- the facilities should contract with a licensed and bonded contractor to have a formal survey done and to implement the changes that are needed to make the facility be accessible. Because, again, we don't want to be in a position of a facility saying, well, DRVT said we were in compliance so if we weren't and someone sues us and we're going to bring DRVT in as a co-defender. We wanted to avoid that. But we wanted our reports to be useful and effective. So

we think that a balance there was to tell people what we think was wrong and how they can fix it and then remind them that they're finally responsible for being accessible and that they should be working with their own contractors to assure that the buildings are meeting the ADA accessibility standards.

>> **Tina Wood:** So these are just some of the tools that we use to conduct the survey. Having a level, tape measure, digital camera, and the door pressure gauge.

And, again, these are just outlines of the areas that we look at during a survey. And these are all outlined in that checklist.

>> **A.J. Ruben:** We also give the facility a copy of the checklist at times.

>> **Tina Wood:** If they request it.

>> **A.J. Ruben:** If they request it so they can see what we were looking at.

>> **Tina Wood:** And we do give them the site to it when we give them our reports so they can link to it and look at it.

So, these are just a few pictures just showing you of examples of non-compliant things that we have found that have been put into reports. And this is one of the non-compliant parking spaces. Why? So there's no marked access aisle. For people who are maybe not familiar, an access aisle is that smaller aisle you'll see with the striped lines painted through it next to an

accessible parking space. That's what we're referring to as an access aisle. There is not one with these parking spaces. It's also not a van accessible parking space. For that reason as well, it doesn't have an access aisle. And for van spaces, the access aisle has to be even bigger than regular parking spaces. And there's only one sign posted. Typically each space has to have its own sign that is above ground so that when a car is parked in that spot, you can see the sign.

And then this is an obvious example of a door way that is not accessible. I think this is probably the largest step up that I had seen in all the surveys so far. Usually for thresholds, depending on the year it was built, there's a few different levels of height but typically you don't want it any more than 3/4-inches high. So this is quite a bit over that.

And then with parking signs, we look at that as well. We really try to encourage the replacements when they have signs that may still be in compliance because of the colors and they're there but they say handicapped parking. And we really try to encourage facilities to update to the newer signs like you can see on the right. They get away from using the word handicapped.

>> **A.J. Ruben:** So this is just a slide to talk about the topics that are covered in the training.

>> **Tina Wood:** Yup. So we go over -- we're not going to go over these all in great detail, but we go over the Americans with Disabilities Act, People First Language, which is putting the person before the disability, disability etiquette,

communicating with and about people with disabilities, and how this relates to emergency shelters, and then always a hot topic, service animals in shelters.

>> **A.J. Ruben:** So what we've trained the shelters' staff and volunteers on the law is a pretty basic, quick overview of the ADA. Not all the shelter volunteers know about that and so we very briefly remind them that there is federal law that was put into place in the 1990s that prohibits discrimination and to make sure that people with public accommodations receive fair access and are not excluded, segregated, or treated unequally. And we reiterate the architectural standard requirements and basically the need for people who are running shelters to provide accommodations so that all sorts of people can use the shelter without feeling abused or discriminated against or not wanted and are able to benefit from the services that shelters provide.

So it's always good to remind folks that the reason we're focusing on providing accommodations and accessibility of shelters is that the law requires that such accommodations are made. That's a good motivator for folks. It reminds them as a community, a national community, we have a focus on making sure people with disabilities are not subject to historic discrimination as they have been in the past.

>> **Tina Wood:** So, again, after we touch on the ADA, we go more in-depth than we will hear about People First Language and just recognizing that it emphasizes the person not the disability. And then we go over words and phrases to avoid in that training, which you see on your screen.

And then words or phrases to use.

And then we really get into assisting individuals with disabilities in sheltering. And this always -- typically generates really good discussions amongst the volunteers when we start doing this training. We provide specific things to consider inside a shelter. This is where the volunteers really appreciate the insight into the responsibility of shelters to be accessible and things to consider that they would not normally have thought about.

The only consistent complaint I ever get about the training is that two hours doesn't seem like it's enough time because it always seems like we're trying to cram stuff in. So one thought is maybe to try to lengthen that presentation in the future. But having been a Red Cross instructor and having taught shelter operations for many years, one area that I knew was now volunteers in our training is specific to what questions you are and are not allowed to ask an individual who is entering a health is we are a service animal.

So more so than not, volunteers are not aware that they can only ask two questions if they have someone coming in with what they believe to be a service animal and the service animal is not readily identified. Because not all service animals have any type of vest or markings on them that will identify easily that they are a service animal. So the two questions that they can ask are: Do you need this animal because of a disability? And what tasks or work has the animal been trained to perform?

And this always raises a lot of eyebrows. We get into some lively discussion about, you know, taking people at face value when they say it's a service animal and how are we supposed to -- is it ok that we just trust them? What are we supposed to do? So it really is a good conversation. It questions about the nature of the severity of a person's disability or ability to function cannot be asked and that the documentation or proof that the animal is a service animal cannot be required either.

So like I said, it really does start some lively discussion. In Vermont we have a lot of animals. It's nice -- actually, there's been a lot going on which could be a whole other webinar, maybe already is, on the disaster animal response team which is going in Vermont.

So some of the comments from evaluation forms that I have gotten from doing these trainings are things such as being more aware of shelter facility layouts to be more functional for persons with disabilities, pointing out most recent accessible language. Also the presenter's knowledge of the Red Cross practices helped to bridge the information. All of the information was useful it would have failed to perform adequately in a situation prior to this class. Interactions and proper etiquette, it helped me appreciate what others are going through. And then somebody wrote, "I thought I knew certain things but I didn't."

We're kind of moving into the lessons learned so far from us doing this project, the trainings and the surveys. I think one of the biggest things is understanding the ADA. Know your state laws. Vermont has some differences

that complement the ADA so you just want to be careful to look at your own state as well as the ADA.

An example of that would be that Vermont has time specifications related to how long a vehicle can park in a metered -- an accessible metered parking space. So an example of a situation we ran into doing a survey was at a town office that had an accessible parking spot, nearly, nicely marked. But they had a little sign under that accessible parking sign that read three-hour parking. And I said, hmm. I don't know if that's ok. I don't know if you can limit the amount of time in a parking space. While the ADA did not have a specific time requirement, I went to the New England ADA Center for some advice out of Boston and they said, well, look at your state; does your state law have anything?

So I went back and looked at the state law and sure enough Vermont allows for up to 10 days parking in an accessible spot before there can be any kind of consequences. So in essence, that town putting up a three-hour parking sign -- unless, you know, there's a caveat to that, too, is it in all the spaces or just the accessible spaces? And it was only in the accessible spaces not all the parking spaces. So part of our survey report to that town cited the state law and asked them to remove those three-hour parking signs which they did. So again, knowing your state as well as the ADA laws is very helpful.

Seeking out training how to do these surveys. I guess part of the background I should have given was that we as an office, Disability Rights Vermont, does accessibility surveys of polling places in Vermont. So we have been doing that for years under the Help Americans to Vote Act. So we've had

training and knowledge of doing surveys before I started doing these shelter surveys. But in doing more surveys, when you start developing questions, you quickly learn that there's a lot you don't know.

And as everybody knows, the ADA is a very, very big vast thing and you can't know it all. So really find out -- get as much training as you can. We were able to do that, again, through the New England ADA Center out of Boston. They go to states and do trainings on how to do surveys, things like that are very helpful. So always seeking out training from experts.

Again, having the knowledge -- like I'm one person. In Vermont that may work ok because Vermont is so small, we know everybody working in the emergency planning or volunteering in a lot of emergency work and then working in Disability Rights Vermont you just develop a lot of connections. So that works well. But in other states, larger states, you would need to maybe find more than one person who has these different areas of expertise and develop some teams.

Again, making sure you use the current 2010 standards. Always ask questions and keep learning because there's a lot to know.

>> **A.J. Ruben:** On top of that, what we found in doing these surveys was the shelter staff and the volunteers were hungry for knowledge. These are people who are doing their work because they really care about other people and they want to do the right thing. Most people just don't really know how to do it or where the resources are. So it was a very collaborative effort. There was no feeling of us playing gotcha with the shelter. There was no implication that if they

didn't do what we asked them to do that, we would be suing them. It was a very collaborative, very constructive effort that's continuing to this day. And that collaborative effort was strengthened by the fact that we were able to work with the Vermont Department of Public Safety and the American Red Cross, two organizations that have a lot of credibility with our local towns. And, frankly, because over the years our office has gotten publicity for doing important things well for people with disabilities. So we also had a good reputation. And to be part of the National Network is always helpful.

So those kinds of collaboration and partnerships are a wonderful way to expand the knowledge of what we care about, which is protecting the rights of people with disabilities to a bunch of other folks who are trying to do good but are not focused on disability rights as much as we are. So we're really happy with the collaboration.

And, again, I can't say it enough. Having Tina Wood on our staff who for years and years and years had been worth with the Red Cross, doing volunteer work, was the reason we got in at such a high level and the reason we were so effective. But as Tina said, the fact that we had also been doing accessibility surveys, polling places for years, also gave us a leg up on how to go about doing this and how to make the reports effective.

We think it's a really great program. We are happy to continue doing it. Hopefully with continued funding from our Department of Public Safety. We also are really grateful to our National Disability Rights Network for helping us make these decisions to go forward with this kind of work.

I think at this point I would ask Michelle Bishop if she would discuss NDRN's working and building partnerships.

Are you ready, Michelle?

>> **Michelle Bishop:** Yes, absolutely. Can everyone hear me ok?

>> **A.J. Ruben:** Yes.

>> **Michelle Bishop:** Great. I've been muted all of this time so I just wanted to make sure.

I just wanted to get a chance to address everyone quickly. Today's webinar is really about the fantastic work that's been done in Vermont which I think is really a unique project and has had some great results. But I wanted to get a quick opportunity to also provide some national contacts. Because while I think projects like this are unique and specific to their environment, I think that we can also replicate some of this or do some other works through partnerships in other regions and states.

So to give everyone a quick background -- I'm not sure exactly who we have on the call and how many of you come from emergency preparedness communities versus a disability rights community. I often find when I speak, some situations like that, several in the audience are really familiar with the P&A network and NDRN some are a little bit, and some didn't know at all. So I wanted

to give a quick background and give an opportunity to build some of these partnerships.

It was addressed at the beginning of the webinar that organizations like Disability Rights Vermont are actually part of the larger advocacy network. The P&As were established by Congress to protect the rights of people with disabilities. So there is a P&A in all 50 states. There is also a P&A in Puerto Rico and the territories, District of Columbia, and there's a P&A specifically in the Four Corners Region of the Southwest that works with the Native-Americans consortium, including the [Inaudible] nations. So there absolutely is a P&A in your region or your state that would be eager to partner.

For those of you on the call who come from the emergency preparedness community, we understand absolutely in the P&A network that organizations like FEMA, like the Red Cross chapters, have a level of expertise in emergency management work especially in some of the really complicated issues we've talked about today like mass care and sheltering that we don't necessarily have in the P&A network. But we feel we have a strong expertise in disability access and disability rights that would be a big ask for organizations like perhaps a Red Cross chapter to also have an expertise in that in addition to everything that goes into preparing for emergencies.

So we really see partnership as an opportunity to combine two unique areas of expertise to best provide services for people with access and functional needs, bringing together the disability rights community and the emergency preparedness community so that rather than expecting one group to be an expert

in all things we really have an opportunity to share expertise and share our resources. The P&As do amazing work nationwide but emergency preparedness is a unique content area for us in that unlike most of the other programs that the P&A offers, we don't have a federal mandate to do this work and we don't have set funding to be able to do this work. So to the extent that an organization like Disability Rights Vermont has been involved in this work is really because we just know that it matters. And we are eager to get involved because it's important and we think we have something valuable to offer.

So while there is an organization like Disability Rights Vermont in every state, the extent to which they're involved in emergency preparedness and the work that they've done around emergency preparedness can vary. So we look at building partnerships uniquely at the regional, state and local levels to enhance the work that we're doing around emergency management.

If you are from the emergency preparedness community and you're maybe not as familiar with our network, I'm here today from NDRN, the National Disability Rights Network, and we are actually the national membership association for the P&As like Disability Rights Vermont. And part of my role at NDRN is to provide training and technical assistance to the P&As in doing emergency preparedness work but we also are, as was mentioned earlier, an MOU/MOA partner with FEMA and the Red Cross. We have active Memoranda's of Understanding and Memorandums of Agreement with FEMA and the Red Cross that enable us to partner nationally. And one of the big things that we're talking about at the national level between NDRN, FEMA, and the American Red Cross is how we can better encourage collaboration and facilitate

those kinds of partnerships at all levels. This is something we've actively been talking about and that we very much want to see happen.

So I would encourage anyone who is engaged in emergency preparedness work that wants to begin working with your P&A, you can absolutely reach out to me. When I'm done speaking, I'll put my contact information in the chatroom so that you have it there. Get in touch with me. I'd be happy to put you in touch with your P&A if you're not already familiar with them. Or feel free to get in touch with the contacts that you have nationally, with Red Cross or FEMA. They can absolutely reach out to me and we can help to start to build that partnership for you. For anyone who may be on the line from P&A who is interested in getting better engaged in this work or building better partnerships, reach out to me. I'm more than happy to help you do that.

I wanted to say quickly, one of the things we're consciously doing right now as well is building a bank of stories like the work that was done with Disability Rights Vermont so that we have a good base of information about how P&As can effectively engage in this work and effectively partner. Like I said, just like you are researching -- researching can be limited. So having a wealth of knowledge for effective communication and effective collaboration is really useful for us. So I would also stress if there's anyone on the line who may be a P&A who has been engaged in this work or an emergency preparedness organization that's been working with your P&A, we would love to hear those success stories as well. So when I provide my contact information, please feel free to share those with me. I would love to have them.

If there's anyone on the line where there's been more of a challenge in building these partnerships, I hope that's never the case but it can be sometimes just because this is a project for the P&As where we don't have a mandate and we don't have that established funding stream. Sometimes it can be difficult to figure out where to engage and where we can be most effective. If for some reason that's the case as well, I would stress that, reach out to me and I would be happy to help you with that.

So I wanted to share that quickly. This webinar today is really about the work that's been done in Vermont and what a great example I think that is of the kinds of partnerships that we can have and the work that we can do. I wanted to take a quick moment to stress that we can help to build these partnerships in other states, other regions and please do not hesitate to reach out to us to do that and, of course, to take a moment to publicly recognize the great work that we've been able to do nationally with FEMA and the American Red Cross, through our MOU/MOA partnerships. It's been a great experience. And I think it's tough a lot and it's helped us to learn to do this work really well and to build fantastic collaborations. So thank you for that.

With that I will make sure to put my contact information in the chat window but I'm going to turn it back over to Tina and A.J. Thank you.

>> **Tina Wood:** Thank you, Michelle.

With that, our presentation is done. There will be our contact information here at the end and a list of resources.

I guess I throw it back over to Lewis now for the question period.

>> **Lewis Kraus**: Yeah. Thank you so much, A.J., Tina, and Michelle.

I do want to encourage everyone to remember to submit your questions in the chat window and we'll get to those in a moment.

Let me back up here so that everybody has the contact information if you want to get ahold of A.J. or Tina there. And Michelle will put her information in the chat window.

A couple of points to emphasize when Tina was describing the connection that she had with the New England ADA Center. I just want to say that that is just one of 10 regional ADA centers. And we are another. And we are one of the co-sponsors of this webinar. So here in the chat window is how you can reach your regional ADA Center. You just dial that 800 number, 1-800-949-4232. And depending upon where you are calling from you will get that regional ADA center and they can do pretty much exactly what Tina described at the New England center would do. They would also be able to give you the resources for how to connect with your local -- or your statewide P&A as well.

So one follow-up to a question that came up while Michelle was talking. P&A stands for Protection & Advocacy. I wanted to make sure we answered that one right off the bat.

All right. So please feel free to put your questions in the chat window. In the meantime, let's go to a couple of questions that have come up so far.

We have a question here that says: What measures have you taken to be more prepared for service animals like, for example, checking rabies shots or things along those lines?

**>> A.J. Ruben:** So we haven't taken any steps to become better at that but we believe that in the 40-some-odd shelters that we have surveyed and have done training with that simply by telling shelter staff about what the ADA requires and what they're allowed to ask about service animals and making them aware that they may well have service animals coming into their shelter, it's allowed the operators of the shelters to begin planning for that. So we haven't suggested, for instance, that they have a checklist that includes making sure the animal has a rabies shot. I'm not sure we would suggest that because, you know, in the midst of a disaster, it might be hard to get your vet on the phone. But I think we made a real big, positive improvement in the receptivity of shelters to service animals by letting them know that that may be something that will be happening to them and letting them start establishing their own policies for how to deal with it.

**>> Tina Wood:** And I also think that might be a question more suited for the Red Cross directly. They do deal with sheltering of animals and not just service animals.

>> **Lewis Kraus**: And I just want to follow-up myself on that. You're asking a question that plugs right into the real context of what this talk was all about, which is if you can get together, and you should be getting together, the partnerships of all of the parts there, the shelter operators, the disability organizations, the Red Cross, whoever, and discussing this and these kinds of topics will come up and can be dealt with within the law and also within the context of your local area. So that might be really helpful as well.

Next --

>> **Michelle Bishop**: Just to back up that point, quickly. I think that one of the things that we found most successful at having those conversations, having everyone at the table from the emergency preparedness and the disability rights community to have these conversations during blue skies so that we know what do in an emergency situation.

I think two things have also been really crucial. A.J. and Tina talked about the training. I think those trainings can make a big difference. Those are going to be people who are running the show on the ground. And I know a lot of this is probably experienced in emergency situations, we had volunteers with no experience when we need all hands on deck. So having trained the folks that are going to be interacting with those volunteers can make a big difference.

The last piece that we've also found helpful, having that MOU/MOA partnership has been really beneficial because it gives us the opportunity to put some of these things in writing in advance so that when you have emergency

shelters opening up and you have staff in those shelters who may or may not have been privy to the prep before an emergency situation, we have something in writing that we can pull out quickly that says we talked ahead of time about how we're going to deal with this and here it is and we can get everyone up to speed as quickly as possible. So having that information put down somewhere, this is how we're going to deal with this, and having both the P&A and your Red Cross chapter, whoever else is involved, have copies of that ahead of time so we all have access to it. Because I think everyone knows how chaotic it truly is when we're in emergency situations. Having all of that done in advance can make a big difference.

>> **Lewis Kraus:** Ok. Great.

Another question here. How do we find people who might have this connection to emergency management and disability?

Before you answer that one, I want to say that there are -- in the archives of this webinar series there was a previous one last November that was an Independent Living Center in Colorado who went out and hired a person from the emergency management world to work with them. So there are a variety of ways to do this. But maybe you guys can add a little bit to how people might find someone who can straddle both worlds or is available for both worlds.

>> **Tina Wood:** This is Tina. I think if I'm understanding the question its like how do P&As find the resources to talk to, is that the question?

>> **Lewis Kraus:** I don't know that it's specifically the P&As. I think it's any of these organizations who are listening, how can they find a Tina Wood?

>> **Tina Wood:** [Laughter] Well, I'm in Vermont. No. I don't know. I guess it's just reaching out, to start off with, going to your local Red Cross chapters. I shouldn't say all states. I would assume most states have annual emergency preparedness conferences or that type of thing where you can go and network. It's really networking and going to disability organizations and talking with their staff. Because you never know who might be on staff and what their qualifications or experiences may be. So it's really just kind of more boots on the ground, getting out there and going to meetings and organizations and reaching out, I think.

>> **A.J. Ruben:** Right. I would start by sending e-mails out to all the disability organizations that you're connected with and ask if any of them have staff who are also involved in the emergency sheltering or emergency preparedness arena and get those people involved. The alternative would be, as Tina said, go to your local Red Cross chapter and asking who is involved in sheltering. Can I start volunteering to learn the ropes of sheltering and in the process bringing along ideas about the disability rights movement. The same thing with the state emergency planning services. In our state it's the Department of public service, public safety, I mean. You could reach out to your state agency that's going to be involved in executing sheltering and find out, you know, when they're having meetings, do they have any kind of public input, or could the person with the disability rights expertise come and just sort of start making connections? And, again, volunteering so that the people from the disability rights movement learn

the language of the people in the sheltering and emergency preparedness movement. Because having common language is really the best way of making progress on improving the system.

>> **Michelle Bishop:** Yes. This is Michelle. I think everyone needs a Tina. And as soon as we figure out how to clone her, we'll let you know. Short of that, A.J. hit the nail on the head. There are absolutely committees and whatever other structures in states and regions that are meeting regularly to prepare for emergencies.

And I think as an organization like a P&A, if it isn't already at the table, it's a matter of locating them and inviting them. Protection & Advocacy centers need to be part of the conversations. There may or may not be someone like a Tina who has a foot in both worlds to join those meetings but -- what we talked about today was our ability to train emergency preparedness folks on the disability piece. But I think realistically we need to train each other. And if we get people who are experts in the disability rights community at the table, have an opportunity to train them as well on the world of emergency preparedness and emergency management and getting everyone involved in the planning process ahead of time gives us that opportunity to look at where we may have expertise lacking on both sides to provide regular training to each other.

So if we cannot find someone who already has experience in both worlds, I think that we can start to build that. But it really starts with the reaching out to whoever is not at the table and bringing them into those planning committees or whatever process exists, whoever is convening regularly to do emergency

preparedness work and then having a conversation about how we can train each other on our distinct areas of expertise.

>> **Lewis Kraus:** Great. And also I'm posting in the main room the archive for the webinars. You can also go and look up that previous webinar that was on this exact topic from November of last year.

Another question here about do you have ideas for doing the health shelter assessments in larger states where there are much larger numbers of shelters.

>> **Tina Wood:** Ideas for how to tackle that? I guess in the larger states you might need teams, I would imagine, depending on what period of time you want to get them done. So I would say you probably need a few teams of people at least. Again, depending on your timeframe, maybe a full-time job. It's not a full-time part of my work. So I fit it in according to our grant funding and when I can get some stuff done in that cycle. But for bigger states you probably need teams of people who can go out and do these surveys.

>> **A.J. Ruben:** We often have two people go out just because it's easier to have one person taking notes and the other person doing the actual measurements. But I would suggest that you shouldn't be overwhelmed by how many shelters are out there because you need to keep in mind that every shelter you go to and you survey and you identify areas that can be improved; that means that people who are going to that shelter are going to have a better experience. So if you can only get to four or five out of 1,000, those four or five

are going to show improvement. So you do it incrementally and know that every single one you go to for that shelter you will have improved services for other people.

**>> Michelle Bishop:** I think when it comes to building teams, we can also think broadly. I think that P&As usually have staff that are going to various parts of the state for all sorts of reasons, given the nature of the work that we do, community work, institutional visits, those types of things where you can pull potentially P&A staff and train them to do these. I think we can pull emergency management staff and volunteers and train them to do these surveys. I think we can also look to the broader disability rights community and potentially pull in Centers of Independent Living, especially in larger states that sometimes have several Centers for Independent Living. If we pull folks from all of those types of organizations together and train them and send them out in teams, it breaks up the work and makes it much more doable. But I think we have -- I think in those kinds of states you have to think larger about who we are going to prep to do these surveys to get it done.

**>> A.J. Ruben:** Another idea that we've used in Vermont for our polling place surveys is to reach out to the people with disabilities in Vermont through various mailings and listservs and ask them to self-report problems at the polling place. So, you know, right before the election we'll send a self-accessibility survey to several hundred people who we have addresses for who have disabilities and say, you know, if you wouldn't mind, when you go vote, could you please take this one-page survey with you and fill it out so we can know what your experience was like.

So it's harder to plan for a disaster but it wouldn't be a bad idea for a large state to find some really good mailing lists of people with disabilities, are different kinds of disabilities, and mail out a really brief one-page survey with a self-addressed stamped envelope saying that, you know, if you have to be sheltered in the next time period, please comment. Or maybe waiting until there's a disaster, even a local regional disaster, and then afterwards doing a similar mailing to say what was your experience. And that could help you narrow down what shelters you should look at and also would help raise the profile of the need of the shelters to be accessible as well as help encourage people to advocate for their own rights.

>> **Lewis Kraus:** Great.

Another question here. You mentioned functional needs shelter trailers with wheelchairs and walkers in them. Was this a grant that you had or just funding given to you?

>> **Tina Wood:** This was for the Red Cross. The Red Cross received funding through the State of Vermont to purchase those trailers.

>> **Lewis Kraus:** Ok. And one other question -- oh, maybe more than one other question. No. One other question. This seems to be a general one but maybe there's something specific about this. Someone is asking who directs emergency response. I don't know, maybe you can respond from, like, how Vermont does it or how it happened in Irene.

>> **Tina Wood:** Well, that's a -- that's a large question. Basically in Vermont when something like an Irene is coming -- and typically we know its coming -- obviously you don't know what the result is going to be -- our State Emergency Operations Center will activate. They will open up. And they open up on different levels. And based on what level they're at determines who they contact as their partners in the community to put them on alert.

So within the state in Vermont, anyway, within the Vermont Emergency Operations Center, you have different organizations such as the Agency of Human Services, the health department, the agriculture department, the state police, and the transportation and so on, Red Cross. So you have a lot of different players who come into the table but sometimes we come in at different times based on what is happening.

So usually that notification if it's going to be a statewide thing, like an Irene, would happen at the state level. Sometimes when it's a local community issue or disaster, say a large fire -- those things still go through the State Emergency Operations Center but the responses and who is sent out are sometimes handled by the local Emergency Operations Centers that will open in towns.

I don't know if that helps. The local Emergency Operation Center is opened within the town structure. And it would be typically your fire chief or your emergency manager for that town or the state police within that town opened up a local EOC. But that still is all information that's funneled through the State

Emergency Operations Center because they typically know everything and should know what's going on within the state.

>> **A.J. Ruben**: I think the takeaway from that is that we think that every state has a different structure of sort of who manages and orchestrates the response to a statewide disaster or a local disaster and we would just encourage everyone in their own states and regions to find out. Because you've got to know who is in charge in order to be able to have effective input into the process.

>> **Lewis Kraus**: Great. Ok. Very good. Thank you so much, A.J., Tina, and Michelle.

For all of you who are listening, I want -- we want to thank our speakers today for sharing their time and knowledge with us.

A reminder for all of you that the session was recorded and it will be available for viewing next week at [www.adapresentations.org/archives.php](http://www.adapresentations.org/archives.php). That is up in the main window, chat window. You will also receive an e-mail with a link to an online session evaluation. Please complete the evaluation for today's program as we really value your input and we want to be able to show our funder what the value of this.

And thank you all for attending today's session. We're looking forward to seeing you on December 10 for our next webinar, ADA National Network Learning Session: Building and Maintaining National Partnerships for Improving

Emergency Preparedness Response and Recovery to Individuals with Disabilities; Lessons Learned.

Thank you so much for attending today. Thank you, A.J., Tina, and Michelle. And for all of you, have a good rest of your day.

Bye-bye.

>> **A.J. Ruben**: Thank you, Lewis.

>> **Michelle Bishop**: Thank you from us.

>> **Tina Wood**: Thank you.