

No hurricanes, no terrorists, no problem

BY LAURA THEIS

Long Island's disaster management and recovery businesses are seeing steady growth – despite a particular lack of disasters.

Theories of impending doom, whether by terrorist attack or hurricane cycles that always seem to suggest this is the Island's year, haven't panned out – at least, not yet. But that doesn't mean Islanders aren't planning.

The disaster business is actually on the rise here, according to Terri Dillman, disaster preparedness coordinator at Ronkonkoma-based Alexander Wall Corp., a property damage restoration and environmental cleanup company.

"People are still planning, even though we haven't had a hurricane or a terrorist attack," Dillman said. "Actually, more than they used to."

In the business of disasters, planning is where the money is. Alexander Wall is cashing in on this planning surge with its Priority Response program, which develops corporate profiles for clients and puts in place response plans.

After only two years of operation, the program has upwards of 80 companies enrolled, proving that planning is now a widespread practice, according to Dillman.

Greg Tellone, chief operating officer at Continuity Centers in Woodbury, has seen the same trend in the disaster-planning industry: a general and steady increase. Continuity

Centers offers clients use of its facility if their buildings become inoperable. This rarely happens, however; Tellone said the 100-seat center, equipped with computers and phones, is only filled a few times each year. Major disasters play almost no role in those occupancies, considering the Island's big disaster drought.

That drought, however, doesn't include "little disasters," such as localized floods and power outages. The July 18 storm, for example, temporarily left Syosset's C&B Consulting without a home, so its employees relocated to Continuity Centers for a day, Tellone said.

"There have been plenty of disasters," he added. "They're just not worldwide or news-making."

But disasters – local or global – don't decide the Continuity Centers' revenue; the threat of disaster does. Monthly fees are charged to companies to reserve space in case of displacement. The company rakes in between a few hundred dollars and \$30,000 per month from its approximately 100 clients in New York City and on Long Island, Tellone noted, and 12 or more new companies join each year.

"People are continuously looking for this service," he said. "It's actually the little disasters that affect most companies."

Aside from natural occurrences, preparedness and response companies handle other business threats, including asbestos, avian flu prevention and workplace violence – the specialty of Nater Associates in Elmont. Felix Nater, president of Nater Associates, considers work-



Greg Tellone

No storms or attacks, but disaster planning thrives on LI.

Firms paying for backup locations and services, just in case.

"Everyday disasters" keeping some preparation firms alive.

place violence the biggest threat to businesses, bigger than the threat of any natural catastrophe.

The issue is taken lightly on Long Island, he said, but "imagine what one horrific act (of violence) could do to business."

Keeping with the preparedness-increase trend, there is also an increase in preparing and planning for violence "disasters," Nater added.

Tellone said the biggest effect on the disaster industry's growth has come from preparedness groups such as the Contingency Planning Exchange, a national organization with one Long Island chapter – of which Tellone is the chairman and Dillman is the vice-chairman. The CPE spreads the word about disaster planning through education and testimonials.

One CPE event, the Catastrophe Readiness Fair, will be held at the Middle Country Public Library's Catastrophe Readiness Clearinghouse on Aug. 14 and will highlight the CPE, Alexander Wall, Continuity Centers and 12 other disaster companies and organizations. The fair is aimed at the companies who "still put disaster planning on the back burner," Dillman noted.

The event leads into September's National Preparedness Month.

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