



**American
Red Cross**

Pikes Peak Chapter

Pages of the Past

A Pikes Peak Chapter History

Researched & Compiled

by

Deborah Griffith MacSwain

These few remembrances can't come close to recognizing the efforts or other significant events that have taken place on behalf of the Red Cross in our community. Some individual's first involvement with the Red Cross was being trained in 1st Aid and Swimming. Others were impacted by military emergencies or disasters. Over the years, the range of programs have changed, but the core Red Cross services are as important as ever.

It is the thousands of volunteers and paid staff that led the Red Cross mission and helped build and continue the tradition of "helping" in our community through the Pikes Peak Chapter of the American Red Cross. There are not enough awards or citations in the world that can thank them or their family members enough for being a part of the Chapter's rich history. In 1975, Will Rogers said it best; " We are so used to the things that the Red Cross does that we sometimes forget to praise them".

Past Chapter History:

1899: The Pikes Peak Chapter had not yet been chartered, but there is recognition that there was a "**Red Cross**" hospital in Victor. According to John VanDerwalker,

in an interview with Walter Kimpton of Florence for the *“Look Back Into History”* series he noted that the 1899 fire that destroyed much of Victor did some damage to the Red Cross Hospital. Later the hospital was known as the Gold Coin Club!

1914: The local Chapter history begins with the **organization of the Pikes Peak Chapter on September 4, 1914**, although the Chapter was not officially chartered by the Central Committee in Washington, D.C. until November 11, 1914.

According to an article in the Gazette dated September 27, 1914, the Pikes Peak Chapter “stirred itself into activity when war with Germany began to loom, and began to do whatever it could in the way of preparing to meet any call that might be made upon it”. Within a few days after organization, the executive committee of the Chapter appointed a committee of 100 people to raise money to help the thousands of wounded soldiers on the battlefields of six European nations. The article continued “A large supply of bandages and other hospital necessities have been made by the patriotic women who have so generously sacrificed time and pleasure to go to Red Cross headquarters every day or so to do this routine work. Many other women have taken courses in first aid nursing..while still others now are devoting their time to this study”.

1914: November 11, 1914, the National **Red Cross Headquarters** in Washington D.C. was so impressed with the initiative and activity of a group of leaders “in that funny little western town” that they **expedited the charter for the chapter** to be named the Pikes Peak Chapter of the American Red Cross. At the time there were 145 chapters nationwide.

1917: June 26, 1917, the **Colorado Springs** community **made history** when they **raised more than \$200,000** for the Red Cross War Campaign effort – double the apportionment made by National Headquarters. The **campaign was led by Spencer Penrose**, Permanent Chairman of the Colorado Springs Red Cross campaigns for WWI. He and his wife Julie gave \$30,000 to the campaign.

1918: The Pikes Peak **Chapter was very active in the WWI War Service** effort. The local chapter was organized by activities and included the committees: First Aid, Home Service, Entertainment, Canteen, and Junior Red Cross. In addition, local

volunteers staffed the War Service departments: supply, cutting out (bandages), gauze rooms and packing. One article in a local paper carried an urgent request by the Red Cross to the public to “please refrain from calling workers at Headquarters except in cases of absolute necessity. There is but one telephone at the building which is in constant need for business – social calls interfere seriously with the efficiency of the work”. At the end of WWI there were more than 3700 chapters and 3 million volunteers.

1919-1930: After WWI, the Chapter operated on a small operating **budget as low as \$800.00** a year, but was **still able to meet** disaster and other **emergency needs when called upon.**

1935: The **first large local disaster was the Monument Creek Flood** on Memorial Day that killed two people. Monument Park along with 365 homes were damaged or destroyed. The Red Cross operated a food kitchen, an emergency hospital, helped rebuild homes and acquired furniture and supplies. **The Red Cross cost for flood relief was \$75,000, of which the Pikes Peak Chapter raised \$30,000.** The rest was raised by other Colorado Red Cross Chapters. According to Leslie Cook, past CEO of the Pikes Peak Chapter, “an **interesting result of the disaster was an agreement by the city that no further building would be allowed in certain flooded areas.** This was a suggestion by national Red Cross disaster workers who helped for 3 weeks after the flood”.

1937: The years after WWI found the Pikes Peak Chapter going from war relief efforts to building other programs including Health and Safety services. **After 3 children drowned in Prospect Lake in separate incidents, the- Chapter campaigned for better lifesaving equipment, more lifeguards and restriction of swimming in certain areas.** Through the Red Cross efforts, a water safety program was started with more trained lifeguards and Water Safety Instructors serving in community aquatic programs.

1945: The Pikes Peak Chapter **fund drive** lead by Russell Law **rasied \$128,775 for the war effort in one day.** This memorable achievement was **hailed on the floor of Congress.** The Chapter assisted in “Operation Haylift” after a snowstorm that stranded thousands of livestock and isolated many ranches in eastern Colorado.

WWII Years: A “Chapter Treasure”, **Mrs. Helen O’Donnell**, a long time Red Cross volunteer and graduate of the University of Colorado Nursing School, **helped start the Chapter’s Red Cross Nurse Aid program**. The training helped fill the void of registered nurses in the area who left for the military. According to an interview with O’Donnell “we had a room set up just like a hospital room on the 2nd floor of the 1600 N. Cascade Chapter House. **Through the program, trained and uniformed nurse assistants were provided to Memorial, St. Francis and Glockner Penrose Hospitals – all volunteers**. Men even participated to help the war effort and came to night classes after working all day”.

WWII through 1960s: The Chapters Gray Ladies and Motor Corp volunteers continued their long tradition of transporting patients to various local hospitals and homes (and volunteering in them), including the Sunnyrest Home started as a TB Sanatorium that was endowed by General Palmer’s Daughter in 1909.

1945: 1950: Pearl Steele, a long time volunteer led the chapters Canteen volunteers and “went to the mountain” to **provide 24 hour canteen services for the firefighters and citizen volunteers working** to put out the Ft. Carson Fires better known as **Operation Blaze Battle**. The wildfire threatened the entire area from Ft. Carson to the Broadmoor Hotel.

1951: The Chapter Canteen program, **the new “mass disaster care” service, receives their first “huge” donation of an “electro- fryer”**. Having just finished training the disaster volunteers put the “fryer” to use serving hundreds of soldiers and citizens fighting a fire in the Monument area.

1958: The Chapter conducts a 1st Aid Course, the first to be held at the newly opened Air Force Academy and Chapter Health and Safety volunteers provide and man the first, 1st Aid unit at the start of the Pikes Peak Hill Climb.

1959: Mrs. Ruth Vinson, a Red Cross volunteer and swimming instructor, **saves a boy from drowning at the YMCA pool**. She receives the Red Cross Certificate of Merit, the highest award for saving another person’s life using Red Cross training. She is the 50th Coloradoan to receive the award. Later in the year Ms. Vinson became trained as a Red Cross Handicapped Swim Instructor and started the

program in Colorado Springs. **Mary Johnson**, a **St. Mary's High School** student becomes **the first Junior Red Cross volunteer** to serve **on the Pikes Peak Board of Directors**.

1962: Local radio station KVOR programmer, **Maggie Houston**, leads the start of **the Junior Red Cross monitor program for the chapter**. The highly successful youth programs receive national recognition later in the year by the "Seventeen" and "Parents" magazines.

1965: The chapter participates with **District 11, the Regional District Libraries and the Public Welfare Department in "Operation Books"**. The program collected and distributed donations of books and magazines to encourage youth summer reading. Chapter disaster workers provide support and money to families affected by a flash flood in Florence, Colorado. Local Brownie and Girl Scouts send Red Cross Friendship Boxes to Vietnam in support of the International Red Cross program.

1967: Red Cross **volunteers secure donations and pack and send more than 500 Red Cross ditty bags to Vietnam**. Some were packed with items for Vietnamese children, given out by U.S. soldiers serving in Vietnam. Others were packed with items for the soldiers. Red Cross personnel serving in Vietnam continually received thousands of ditty bags from chapters all over the country. Other Red Cross volunteers provide time at the Colorado Springs Day Nursery.

1967-69: Locals Marilyn Jones, Bobby Vinson, Debby Griffith MacSwain, and Joan Haines **served one year tours as Red Cross Recreation Workers (affectionately known as Donut Dollies)** in Vietnam and Korea. Donald Heuser served in Vietnam as an Assistant Field Director.

1970: Kaman Sciences becomes the first business in Colorado Springs to offer Multimedia First Aid to its employees.

1975: Paul Signorelli, the chapter Disaster Chairman reminded local residents to take advantage of low cost flood insurance. In other news...Rose Rook, a Water Safety Instructor started a swim program for apartment dwellers, a new Red Cross First Aid Course on helping a choking infant was introduced and the chapter provided disaster health and welfare messages for families of survivors of the Big Thompson Canyon flood.

1982: The Pikes Peak Chapter provides more than \$12,000 to help 27 residents of the Cliff House Fire get back on their feet. Jan and Bob Temple received the Certificate of Merit for saving the life of a man. In December, two fires within 18 days left 10 people homeless. According to Leslie Cook, Chapter Manager, "it was a difficult time as some of the homeless were severely handicapped".

1984-1985: Students at Lincoln Elementary School raised \$650.00 for the International Red Cross African Relief Fund. The Pikes Peak Road Runners sponsored a 10K Polar Bear Run for the African Relief Fund. A CPR class was given to 40 employees of the Colorado Springs National Bank. Bank President Bob Baker thanked the chapter with a gift of the "top of the line", "Cadillac of manikins", a "Recording Annie". **At the urging of community leaders, the Chapter opens a Homeless Shelter later called the Montgomery Shelter.** The Shelter was turned over to the Salvation Army in 2004 to better meet the needs of the community and in keeping with the missions of both the Red Cross and Salvation Army.

1989: A fire in Palmer Lake blackened 1200 acres. **700 people were forced from their homes.** Red Cross volunteers were ready to help and set up operations at the Palmer Park Town Hall.

1990: A tornado swept through the Rush, Limon area doing an estimated \$20,000,000 in damages. **The Chapter and Ft. Carson sends Red Cross volunteers and Nurses to help.** The news of the tornado was announced at the International Commission for Uniform Methods of Sugar Analysis convention being held at the Broadmoor Hotel. The group's president asked for donations and more than 200 people from 40 countries reached into their pockets. The donations were turned over to the Red Cross.

2000: “I want to **thank you...for the aid and generosity your organization provided for all the parents and relatives of the Texas bus crash victims.** The compassion and concern that you extended was such a warm gift of love”. This was a thank you note written to Adri Winklehake and other Red Cross workers for their response to the Canon City Bus Crash. Fremont County also gave special recognition given to Betty Murphy for Armed Forces Emergency Services, Peter Hansen for Advisory Council, Charlene Cormier for Disaster Services and Al Witt for Health and Safety Services.

2001: One hundred thousand people displaced in a matter of minutes. Fifty thousand people immediately lost their employment. A sanitation workers sole job of washing off boots, 16 hours a day...day after day at Ground Zero, and three thousand deaths from one state, New Jersey. These are just a few images of the horrendous aftermath of **September 11, 2001.** The Pikes Peak Chapter, thousands of miles away assisted in the recovery as most Americans did. **More than 20 trained Red Cross volunteers deployed to New York, New Jersey and the Pentagon.** Many went back again. Some were Mass Care Workers, others Mental Health Specialists. All have hundreds of stories of personal grief mixed with deep-felt satisfaction for providing relief in the form of a hot cup of coffee, meal and especially a willingness to listen to those suffering and hurt.

2002: The Iron Mountain fire and Hayman Fire destroy homes and property. The Gazette issues a special Pikes Peak Chapter Newsletter within the daily morning delivery reporting on the fires and Red Cross response. **More than 850 trained Red Cross volunteers provided relief** to those affected and first responders.

2003: Don Armes, a Vietnam veteran, Red Cross volunteer and the Ft. Carson Aquatics Director provide CPR and First Aid care to a man who had collapsed while Armes and others were attending Pool Management training in Orlando, Florida. His actions resulted in his receiving the **American Red Cross Certificate of Merit Award.** The award is the highest award given for a person who saves or sustains a life by using skills and knowledge learned in an American Red Cross Health and Safety course. The certificate bears the signature of the President of the United States, who is the honorary chairman of the American Red Cross.

2005: The Chapter, along with most of the country, is impacted by the wrath and destruction of **Hurricanes Katrina and Wilma**. Trained disaster volunteers deployed to the affected areas, thousands of dollars were raised for disaster relief and more than **2500 men, women, and children arrived in the Pikes Peak region** after being evacuated from their homes. Most were families with children, some elderly, all without jobs, few possessions or much knowledge of this mountainous area. The first chapter assistance was given the day after the Hurricane struck. As the numbers grew, the chapter along with other agencies formed a “relief center” for “one stop” help. Hundreds of new Red Cross volunteers attended training, some to stay and help locally, others to deploy. In all, the Pikes Peak Chapter **provided more than \$500,000 in local disaster assistance.**

2007: Chapter Volunteers respond to the **Castlewest Apartment Fire** that **destroys a 135 unit complex and leaves over 320 people** homeless. This was one of the **largest local responses in Chapter history.**