

Central California volunteer boosts efficiency in Salvation Army disaster response

When Bob Bradley retired at 51 following years of running a successful business, he knew he wanted something more.

“Instead of just sitting home on that recliner watching TV, I’d rather be out here doing something that makes a difference to our community,” he said.

He decided to get into emergency and disaster response by first volunteering with the American Red Cross in the Modesto, California, area, where he is based.



Nine years and a Clara Barton award later, he was ready for more.

That was when the then chair of [The Salvation Army Emergency/Disaster Services \(EDS\)](#) contacted him. His first task? Getting an old canteen up and running after it had been sitting for a decade in the warehouse.

That was 10 years and some 20 deployments ago. Today, Bradley is the EDS chair—someone who has helped shape The Salvation Army’s systems, processes and future responses in the Golden State Division, which serves Central and Northern California. He’s also deepened his commitment by serving on The Salvation Army Modesto Advisory Board and the Stockton (California) Adult Rehabilitation Center (ARC) Advisory Board.

Following the flooding caused by a levee collapse in Planada, California, in January 2023, Bradley was part of a team that responded.



Courtesy Bob Bradley.

“You get jacked up when you get that call,” he said. “It gets my blood going, and it’s just something that I enjoy doing. I know I’m doing good. I’m making a difference for them and that’s what keeps me going.”

The group served some 8,000 meals in 10 days out of the kitchen in the nearby Merced Corps, which got Bradley and fellow responder EDS Officer Captain Jeff Breazeale thinking: What if The Salvation Army EDS had coverage zones throughout California’s Central Valley so it could respond more efficiently during emergencies?

The pair got to work, taking inventory of The Salvation Army’s corps and what they could offer. Facilities and properties for setting up mobile canteens and trucks for food storage along the Highway 99 corridor were all taken into account. Six months later, they compiled the information in a book of established zones.

“Within our EDS, we have a necessity to be able to respond rapidly in the event of an emergency,” Breazeale said. “We can activate one of those zones, and in that zone, we are able to respond within two hours to any disaster that happens along the 99 corridor.”

Since Bradley is based in Modesto, his zone spans the Sacramento and Fresno areas. He said getting on scene—even with just snacks and water while other agencies assemble and meal services are planned—is helpful to first responders, especially local fire departments who otherwise would have to send someone from the fire to get refreshments for those on the front lines.

“We don’t want them to leave the scene,” Bradley said. “We’ll say, ‘You stay and fight the fires. We’ll be more than happy to come and get you the water. We’ll feed you. We’ll get you snacks, and we’ll get anything you need so you can continue to fight the fire and we’ll do this other part.’”

It’s all about being prepared.

“The hard part is the prep work,” Bradley said. “If you don’t have a lot of that prep in place, and then you get a call to hit a disaster, you’re going to be the disaster. You don’t want to be the one that gets a call and says, ‘Well, my canteen’s down,’ or ‘I don’t have the folks to get out there’... The disaster, when it happens, is the easiest part, because you’re already prepared for it.”

To help The Salvation Army further its [EDS preparations](#) in the Golden State Division, Bradley has helped train new volunteers in different areas, covering topics like [how to use a canteen](#).



Courtesy Bob Bradley.

“We’re trying to get—and keep getting—people excited about EDS,” he said.

Another element? [Ham radio](#)—something Bradley said is being implemented in the region. In Turlock, California, where Breazeale is the corps officer, The Salvation Army has a mobile communication truck—something Bradley said will play a “big part” if there is a major disaster.

“Bob has an amazing heart, and he has a drive and a will and a want to help in the community, and he’s really latched on to the Emergency/Disaster Services operations on how and how we provide support for survivors,” Breazeale said.

But Breazeale is quick to note, EDS isn’t Bradley’s only commitment. He’s the chairperson of the Modesto Advisory Board and volunteers on the Stockton Adult Rehabilitation Center Advisory Board—a position Bradley said is one he deeply enjoys.

“We’ve taken up quite a few different folks that have different types of addictions and got them up to Stockton,” he said. “When we go up there once a month, fellas come up to us and give us a big hug and tell us ‘Thank you for what you did.’”

He tells them: “No, we just got you here. God did the rest.”

“That’s very rewarding, because we could see with our own eyes the difference that we’ve made,” he said.

Bradley’s difference-making has been felt. He’s received the Others Award, one of the highest civic awards given by The Salvation Army. He was also part of a small number of honorees with the Golden State Division’s The Way Out Award, named for Salvation Army founder William Booth’s “In Darkest England and The Way Out,” which sought to improve the conditions for those living in poverty.

Bradley is the first to say he’d much rather be on the inside helping than on the outside looking in.

“I still just need something to look forward to in the morning, to get up, get out of bed, and a purpose to come down here and still try to make a difference,” he said.

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