

OVERHAUL AT RED CROSS, JOB CUTS TO HELP WORK



For the American Red Cross, it has, no doubt, been a challenging year. While trying to cope with a relentless series of natural disasters, the organization has carried out a nationwide overhaul that dropped more than 1,500 jobs, pared down many of the local offices and left some former loyalists with badly bruised feelings. President Gail McGovern says that the 130-year-old Red Cross had little choice but to restructure in order to ward off a projected deficit. It has merged and consolidated many chapters to reduce duplication, and given the national office control over local fundraising so all funds can be spent as strategically as humanly possible. "We have remarkably loyal donors, and they're also demanding," McGovern said in an interview. "They want to be sure their hard-earned dollars are being used to optimize their mission and are going to help the people we serve." McGovern said that during the year, the Red Cross has eliminated roughly 1,000 positions at its local and regional chapters and about 170 positions at its Washington headquarters-in each case about 10 percent of the work force. In addition to that, about 400 posts out of roughly 20,000 were eliminated in the biomedical and blood services division. McGovern insists that the core missions-notably disaster relief, assistance to military families and blood banks-will not be impaired. McGovern also said that the Red Cross responded vigorously to this year's nationwide onslaught of tornados, floods, hurricanes and wildfires. "If there was any doubt in anyone's mind that we would be able to fulfill the mission, that doubt was removed," she said. "If anything, we're doing it better." The network of chapters is still large-about 600 nationwide, which is compared to more than 800 from five years ago. The chapters operate with a core of paid staffers and many volunteers, and some have more than one office location in their entire service area. McGovern has said that only about 20 of the 1,200 locations nationwide will be closed completely, but many of them will have reduced staffs and functions. Such is the case in far-western Nebraska, where the overhaul became bitter. Plans to downgrade the nearly century-old Greater Nebraska Panhandle Chapter into a service center prompted volunteer board members to resign in protest, and its executive director was fired and escorted from the chapter's office in tears. According to Rick Tuggle, who is a Scottsbluff banker and chairman of the chapter's board, the upheaval began with an emailed memo in July. The panhandle chapter-which served 11 counties over 14,000 square miles-was told that it would be folded into a neighboring Nebraska chapter, Central Plains, with the local board ceding authority over how the money it raised would be spent.

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