



Somerset County hazmat team receives state certification

Somerset County commissioners John Vatauvuk and Jim Marker congratulate county hazmat team coordinator Joel Landis at the hazmat building in Friedens Wednesday. Commissioners recognized the hazmat team for receiving its state certification. (Staff photo by Katie Walker)

By KATIE WALKER Daily American Staff Writer

After months of training and preparation the newly formed Somerset County hazmat team Wednesday received recognition as a state certified emergency response group.

Somerset County commissioners congratulated the team and the Somerset fire department for their efforts. The congratulations took place during a reception at the hazmat building in Friedens.

Somerset fire department informed county officials earlier this year that it would terminate its hazmat contract after serving the county for nearly two decades.

A transitional committee consisting of local emergency response personnel, county officials and firefighters have been working since early spring to mobilize a county team.

“The Somerset County hazmat team includes 44 volunteer members from nine different fire departments,” team coordinator Joel Landis said. “We have members from Addison to Scalp Level.”

County commissioners Pam Tokar-Ickes, John Vatauvuk and Jim Marker thanked the team for their commitment to rigorous weekend training.

“The training is unbelievable,” Vatauvuk said. “They’ve spent many weekends away from their families.”

Somerset fire department extended its hazmat contract by two months so that the team would have time to complete the transition.

Landis said many people have made donations to help get the team started. Dan Leiss of Jenny Products Inc. donated an air compressor to the newly mobilized team. George Coyle of Somerset Medical Services also donated an EMS bag, he said.

Terry Phillips of the Scalp Level/Paint fire department will lead operations in the northern end of the county. Gerald Parry of the Berlin fire department will head the central division, and Gary Compton of the Addison fire department will head the southern end of the county’s group.

Somerset County Emergency Management Agency Director Richard Lohr said he would like to see the team expand its membership even more in the upcoming months.

“This is just a start,” Lohr said. “We’re always looking for new members.”

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