

Greater New Bedford Voc-Tech students graduate from emergency preparedness program

If a disaster breaks out on the SouthCoast, GNB Voc-Tech students are ready to take action.

Thirty two sophomores from the school's Legal and Protective Services concentration graduated from the Community Emergency Response Team program on Wednesday morning. In a ceremony held at the school, Vocational Coordinator Joanne Romanelli said the graduates will make their hometowns safer places.

"When I think of CERT and all the certifications that come along with the program, I think of community," she said. "Many graduates of GNB Voc-Tech want to stay local, and these students will be the ones that arrive should a tragedy occur in our communities."

Bristol County Sheriff's Office Col. David Gavigan and Capt. William Camara are the instructors for the CERT program, which focuses on disaster preparedness for hazards and disaster response skills such as fire safety, search and rescue, teamwork and medical operations.

The program consists of both classroom work and hands-on learning with table-top exercises and mock disasters. For example, in one of the final lessons, students were presented with a mock natural disaster and, using a map of New Bedford, had to communicate which public safety resources were needed in which areas.

Romanelli said these critical skills can make a big difference on victims should a disaster strike.

"The first person on the scene of a tragedy is burned into the memory of those who are in need," she said.

The graduates are already in contact with the Emergency Management Directors in New Bedford, Fairhaven and Dartmouth.

Each graduate received a CERT backup containing emergency supplies. Items such as a flashlight, helmet, work and rubber gloves, goggles, tools, first-aid kit and a mask went home with every graduate to use should the need arise. The backpacks were paid for by the New Bedford Fire Department and the New Bedford Emergency Management Agency.

The sophomore graduates are Carla Victoria Alves, Antone Arruda, Haley Conrad, Domenic Dos Santos, Aaliyah Encarnacion, Victoria Fernandes, Josibel Gomes, Areyanna Haith, Elvis Jovel-Arias, Emily Medina, Dominic Mendonca, Jailyne Rivas, Tempest Rosario, Carly Rose, Jackson Soares, Michelle Veliz-Romano, Alejandro Anaya-Maldonado, Mackenzie Barreira, Brendan Carter, Madeline Cisneros, La Ani Correia, Elijah Daluz, Casey Dean, Sofia Dias, Shaylee Levasseur, Admilson Lopes Cardoso, Ivelize Lugo, Victoria Melo, Thairy Nunez Medina, Katelyn Pereira, Robert Pereira and Madison Tavares.

Bristol County Sheriff Thomas M. Hodgson praised the graduates for their hard work and commitment to public safety.

"It's amazing to see so many students at a young age be so invested in their community," he said. "There's nothing more rewarding in life than helping someone in need and that's what you've learned. I hope some of you pursue careers in corrections, police or emergency services because we need good leaders in those professions."