

Event Report

Pepper/Olive Disaster Popup

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www.CreativeCrisisLeadership.org

Summary

On May 20, 2017 a neighborhood event took place in the Pepper/Olive neighborhood in Palo Alto CA. The goal was to improve individual and collective resiliency to disaster at the neighborhood level, and to test an event model that incorporates an experiential learning experience and a traditional neighborhood BBQ.

This report offers an overview and evaluation of the event.

Event Overview

The goal of the Pepper/Olive Disaster Popup was to improve individual and collective resilience to disaster at the neighborhood level. It comprised a 4-hour experiential learning experience followed by a BBQ. This was a pilot of the event format and learning materials undertaken in collaboration with Creative Crisis Leadership¹, whose mission is to understand and entrain spontaneous leadership skills in crisis.

The event was organized by Susanne Jul, a resident of the neighborhood, and a member of the Creative Crisis Leadership team. It was supported by a grant from Palo Alto's Know Your Neighbors Grant Program², and was developed in cooperation with City of Palo Alto Office of Emergency Services³.

Objectives

The specific goal of the event was to strengthen the resilience of the Pepper/Olive neighborhood. This was defined in terms of three subgoals:

1. Increase and strengthen personal relationships among residents and other neighborhood members
2. Increase practical preparedness knowledge of individual participants
3. Provide participants with opportunities and coaching for practicing mental flexibility and agility in the face of the unknown, with a particular focus on improving group coalescence and collective action

A larger goal was to test the viability of a half-day experiential-learning-game format for a neighborhood event to increase community resiliency.

Neighborhood

The neighborhood targeted was Pepper and Olive Avenues in Palo Alto California. This area comprises approximately 40 households. 6 of these are part of a small condominium complex. The remaining households are in single-family residences, mostly single-story houses with 2-4 bedrooms. Additionally, there are 6 small businesses, and one individual residing in a truck.



Promotion & Registration

The event was promoted through personal contact and word of mouth. 4-5 weeks before the event, flyers were hand-delivered to every household and business in the area. In all but a few cases, personal contact was made with someone from the household or business. 10 days before, a reminder card was delivered to all households that had not yet signed up. 3 days before, all households that had not signed up received a "non-participant" leaflet describing possible impacts. This leaflet also served as a reminder to any who might still want to participate.

¹ www.CreativeCrisisLeadership.org

² <http://www.cityofpaloalto.org/gov/depts/mgr/neighborhoodgrant/>

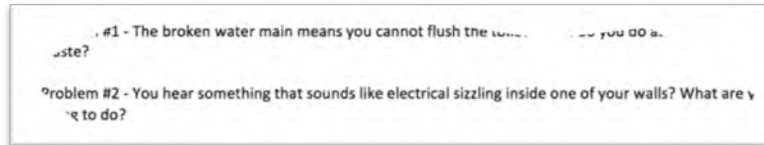
³ http://www.cityofpaloalto.org/services/public_safety/office_of_emergency_services/

Participants were able to sign up through EventBrite⁴. This allowed for collection of information used to tailor the learning experience to individual households, for instance, general ages of participants and special concerns.

Format

The learning experience combined techniques from live action roleplay and disaster exercising. It was played out in two rounds. During each

round, participants were asked to imagine that a catastrophic earthquake had occurred, and were given a set of challenges they might be facing. They were asked to “solve” these challenges by developing a plan and locating necessary resources. As the experience progressed, unsolved problems and consequences of solutions (e.g., having turned off a gas main) would accumulate and need to be taken into account during further action.



The first half of each round simulated the onset of the earthquake, followed by a “time jump” to three days later. In each round, participants were asked to imagine that everything was happening in the present time and place. So, initial onset was on Saturday afternoon, anyone present or absent was or was not there, cabinets were open or closed as they stood, etc. The two scenarios were very similar, but, in one, the underlying challenge was that power was out and unlikely to be restored for several weeks. In the other case, water was shut down for several weeks.

The event started with an introductory briefing. Then each household was given an envelope, and asked to return to their home. An airhorn signaled the onset of the first earthquake, at which time participants opened their envelopes to read a description of the circumstances in which they found themselves, along with the challenges they were facing.



Another airhorn signaled the end of the round. Participants then reassembled to share their impressions and experiences, and for a brief discussion of the mental processes and behaviors of spontaneous crisis leadership. After this reflection session, they again dispersed to their homes with a new envelope for the second round. This was followed by another reflection session, this time accompanied by a discussion of basic home

⁴ [PepperOlivePopup.eventbrite.com](https://www.PepperOlivePopup.eventbrite.com)

preparedness recommendations, and what residents can expect from the city and other response agencies.

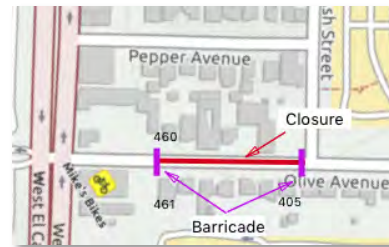
During the experience, participants communicated their “solutions” to organizers and field coordinators by sending photos and text messages, and receiving text messages in return. Organizers and field coordinators stayed in touch with each other via hand-held radios.



After the conclusion of the learning experience, participants stayed for a BBQ. The students of one resident, a music teacher, provided entertainment in the form of live music. Another resident brought out go-kart-like toys to everyone’s amusement and pleasure. The BBQ took advantage of a Zero Waste Party Pack made available by the city of Palo Alto.

Having reusable dishes and utensils lent a substantive atmosphere to the event.

All group activities, including the BBQ took place on the 400 block of Olive Avenue, which was closed for the duration.



Evaluation

Strengthening Connections

There is ample evidence that the event met the goal of increasing and strengthening relationships across the neighborhood.

First, a group of seven neighbors—including two children—participated in promoting the event and preparing for the street closure and BBQ. While these three particular households were already on speaking terms, the group became a well-functioning team ready to depend on each other. Additionally, these individuals met many other residents and members of the small businesses as they distributed flyers and explained the event, and now form a kernel for neighborhood action.



Second, a total of 34 individuals from 18 households attended at various points during the day. 31 individuals from 17 households participated in the learning experience. 3 additional individuals came to the BBQ, 1 from a household not otherwise represented.

Of the 10 individuals who completed a survey after the learning experience, 9 said that they had spoken with 3-9 people with whom they had never spoken before, and 1 reported having spoken to 1-2 new individuals. In this same group, 2 said that they had renewed dormant acquaintances with 3-9 people, and 7 said that they had done so with 1-2 people. This suggests that most participants initiated multiple new relationships with neighbors.

Third, 9 volunteers supported the event. 6 of these were Palo Alto residents. While their interactions with neighborhood residents do not strengthen neighborhood bonds, they may serve to increase sense of identity and cohesion across the city.

4 of the volunteers were Emergency Services Volunteers (CERT and NPC) with the Palo Alto Office of Emergency Services. They provided helpful insight into the offerings and recommendations from the planned response system, and also increased neighborhood residents' understanding and sense of connection with the city.



Increasing Practical Preparedness Knowledge

About half of the challenges presented during the learning experience were centered on practical home and family preparedness, such as locating gas shutoffs, marshaling water and other critical resources, and practicing “duck, cover, hold.” This resulted in a steady stream of texts and photos related to supplies and resources as people “solved” their challenges, indicating that they were developing their knowledge.



Of the 10 individuals who completed the survey, 6 specifically reported learning outcomes related to practical preparedness, for instance, “[Compared to this morning, I feel] more ready. Water heater for water helpful info. Saw where I was lacking and need to regularly replenish gas & water.”

Practicing Mental Flexibility and Agility



1b. Drinking water: Investigate how to pull and filter water from hot water heaters. With 100gal, should have more than I need, check with others who may have tankless.



About half of the challenges presented during the learning experience were designed to encourage people to think more broadly about the difficulties they were facing, and to focus not only on their own situations but also on those of the people around them. Participants were given time and opportunity to think creatively about solutions, and to think about resources that neighbors might have or need. This resulted in a number of texts and photos of creatively solved problems, as well as of a number of joint neighbor efforts.

Of the 10 individuals who completed the survey, 6 specifically reported learning outcomes related to feeling more confident in their ability to manage unexpected situations, and to rely on the people around them. For instance, “I thought I would have had to be self reliant. Others may be able to help and it’s ok to ask for it.”

Event Model

Approximately 45% of occupied households in the neighborhood participated in the event (42% in the learning exercise). Of the households that did not participate, approximately half were enthusiastic about the prospect of the event, and expressed dismay that prior commitments prevented them from participating.



While none of the small businesses attended, 4 were interested in the event and might have participated had it taken place on a weekday evening. (Few of the employees of these

businesses live in Palo Alto, and only one is open on Saturday. The owner of this business stopped briefly at the BBQ, but an unexpected family situation prevented him from staying.)



Of the 10 individuals who completed the survey, 7 indicated that they would wish to repeat the experience and would recommend it to others. The remaining 3 did not answer this question. It should be noted that they did not respond to any of the questions on the reverse of the survey, and may not have been aware of these questions.

People cited different reasons for enjoying the experience, including “It is a great way to meet neighbors and gain comfort [in] working together,” “because it made me think and discuss what ‘we’ needed to do,” and “A casual situation that causes you to think seriously in your home, take a good look around.”

Improvements

While the overall response was highly favorable, there were indications that improvements can be made.

First, 31 individuals participated in the first round of the learning experience, and 22 continued with the second round. 4 of these defections were anticipated. The 5 unexplained defections all came from households with a single participant. This suggests that the learning experience should be improved to be more engaging for “singleton” households, possibly by increasing necessary interactions between households.



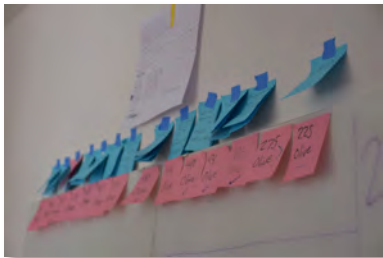
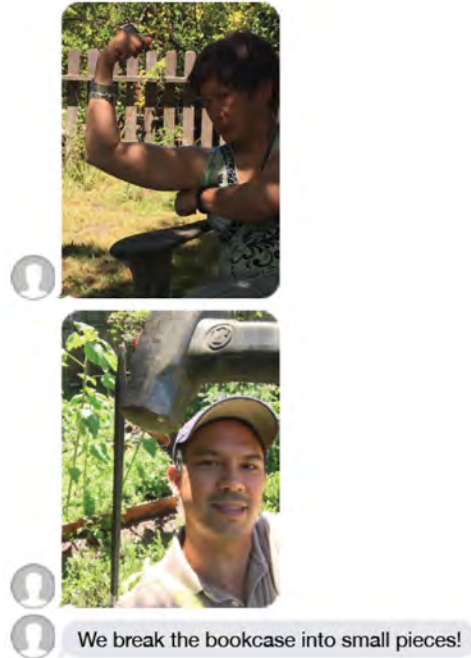
Second, of the 22 individuals who participated in the second round, only 10 completed the survey. Eliminating 4 children too young to complete it leaves 8 adult participants who did not. Whether this was from temporary absence, further attrition, or unwillingness to provide negative feedback is unknown.

Finally, feedback from participant and volunteer surveys suggest that the challenges could be made more engaging by being more interactive. They also indicated that the existing challenges could be accommodated in a shorter learning experience, possibly three hours. Feedback also included comments around some points of confusion in instructions, but these were well-known and can be attributed to this being a pilot event.

Conclusions & Recommendations

Overall, the event was a success. Participants got to know their neighbors, learned about disaster preparedness, and gained confidence in their ability to rely on themselves and their neighbors in an actual disaster. The event model also proved viable, attracting enthusiasm and a high turnout.

There are several factors that contributed to the success of the event that should be preserved. First, engaging a small group of residents in promotional activities and practical arrangements was instrumental in making the neighborhood take communal ownership of event activities and, by extension, disaster preparedness. Second, including a no-fee BBQ was key to making the event attractive, set the tone for a festive experience, and solidifying newly formed relationships. Third, the use of live action roleplay techniques to allow participants freedom to shape their own narratives was critical to allowing participants to internalize the realities they might face in disaster, and subsequently accept responsibility for their own preparedness and response.



Improvements are needed in two areas. First, practical coordination before and during the learning experience could be improved, specifically related to materials preparation and volunteer integration. Second, the learning experience itself needs to be revised to inspire more cross-household interaction, be more engaging for “single” participants, and can, in general, be “tightened.”

In the weeks since the event, there have been several indications that it has had an enduring effect. Several days after the event, one neighbor gleefully called across the street, “I got my water!” Two other neighbors, encountered at farmer’s market two weeks afterwards remarked, “Yeah, we keep thinking about it, and finding little things that we can do to be more prepared. Like having more bottled water, and cycling through it.” This validates the suggestion made by one participant on the survey, “[I] recommend that other neighborhoods do this, too!”

Expenses

Photocopying*	\$376
Event insurance	\$253
Game development services	\$500
Photographer**	\$125
Supplies (Paper, airhorns)	\$66
Food	\$212
Grand Total	\$1532



* Due to unclear instructions, the team sent to do photocopying used counter services rather than self-serve copiers. This added a cost of approximately \$300.

** Not reimbursable under the city grant.

APPENDIX Promotional Handouts

Flyer

Pepper/Olive Disaster Popup

May 20 2017
Saturday
1 pm – 5 pm



Spend an afternoon having fun, and help yourself and your neighbors on Olive and Pepper be better prepared for disasters large and small. In the course of this live game, we'll play our way through some realistic scenarios. We'll have a chance to practice how we want to react, and discover how we can work together to take care of everyone. We'll also talk about home and family preparedness, what we can expect from the city and response agencies, and work to make sure everyone has the basics in place by the end of the weekend. The goal is to practice improvising, have fun, and get to know each other. No preparation needed!

Sign up now

PepperOlivePopup.eventbrite.com

- Get to know your neighbors on Olive and Pepper.**
- Get better prepared for disasters and emergencies.**
- Have fun and enjoy a BBQ!**

Have questions? Want to help?

Susanne Jul, 430 Olive Ave
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susanne.jul@gmail.com

Raminder Bajwa, 450 Olive Ave
+1 650-861-1439 (c)
raminder@gmail.com

Scott Anderson, 431 Olive Ave
+1 650-785-2122 (c)
scottericanderson@gmail.com

*In cooperation with Palo Alto Office of Emergency Services and Creative Crisis Leadership.
Supported by Palo Alto's Know Your Neighbors Grant Program.*

Reminder Card

□

**Pepper/Olive
Disaster Popup**

May 20 2017
Saturday
1 - 5 pm

Sign up now!



PepperOlivePopup.eventbrite.com

Or let us know you're coming, and we'll be in touch:

Address _____ Pepper Olive

Name _____

Email or phone _____

Drop card off at
Susanne Jul
430 Olive
Raminder Bajwa
450 Olive
Scott Anderson
431 Olive

Pepper/Olive Disaster Popup

May 20 2017
Saturday
1 - 5 pm



There's still time to sign up!
PepperOlivePopup.eventbrite.com

What if I'm not participating?

Here are some ways in which you might be affected:

- **Street closure**
 - The 400 block of Olive will be closed to all traffic from noon until 8 pm.
- **Foot traffic**
 - There will be more people walking through the neighborhood than usual. Please drive with extra care.
- **Noise**
 - We will be using air horns 6 times during the afternoon, less than 5 seconds each time. (You might have heard these on boats or at sporting events.)
 - There will be music playing in the area of 430 Olive from 5:30-7 pm. At least part of it will be live.

**If you have any concerns at any time, please contact
[Susanne Jul](mailto:SusanneJul@creativecrisisleadership.org) • 430 Olive • 650-488-7886**