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Neighbors

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Rowlett CERT helps during flooding

STAFFREPORT

Teams from Rowlett's Community Emergency Response Team were pressed into service March 19 to help the city of Rowlett cope with street flooding caused by extremely heavy rainfall in the area.

"Within an hour of our initial call out, we had deployed 14 teams in the city with a total of 53 members who responded," said Whitney Laning, president of the Rowlett Citizen Corps Council, which sponsors the CERT program. "Teams were deployed around the city to set up and monitor barricades where streets were impassible due to high water."

Driving through high water can have unexpected and harmful results. The National Weather Service says "Turn Around, Don't Drown" when you encounter high water or barricades.

"Even with the warnings, people still try to drive around the barricades and signs," Laning said. "Most cars can be swept away in as little as 18 to 24 inches of water. We're trying to prevent that."

Rowlett CERT recently conducted a drill to help prepare for emergencies like the flooding.

"The drill helped the CERT teams hone their skills and that came in handy this past weekend," Laning said. "The teams worked through some scenarios involving wild fires in case that was to happen in Rowlett. The same skills presented in the drill easily applied to the flooding on Sunday."

CERT braved the elements for six hours.

"It was great to work with volunteers that wanted to be there and help. Even in the pouring, cold rain I did not hear one person complain about the weather. It seemed that the worse the weather got, the more everyone was determined to do what was asked and expected of them," said CERT team member David Sward.

"It was a rainy and physically miserable situation, especially

after darkness fell. It was the real thing. I am bursting with pride to be associated with such a group as Rowlett CERT," said Michael Lucas, CERT assistant administrator. Such dedication and commitment is common among the members of CERT.

"They all have a passion for helping others and for making their community better," Laning said. "The program inspires citizens to act and take responsibility for their neighborhood. Our members exemplify what it means to volunteer in your community."

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Whitney Laning, president of the Rowlett Citizen Corps Council

The CERT program trains citizens to be self-reliant for up to 72 hours after a major disaster or emergency. But CERT is not just for disasters. Rowlett has embraced the theme of CERT and pressed the program into service for emergencies such things as searching for lost people, assisting with evacuations and traffic control and even fire watch during fireworks displays at city events.

Last September, CERT helped out in the Flower Hill neighborhood after wind damaged trees and some roofs.

"It was kind of scary," Laning said. "The storm came out of nowhere. Trees were blown down, roofs were torn apart, and my back lawn looked like it had snowed because of all the hail."

CERT was activated to canvass the neighborhood looking for damage and to check on residents.

"I never thought it would happen in my own back yard. It taught me to be ready and get prepared," Laning said.

Rowlett CERT sponsors two courses this year for new members who want to complete the CERT training.

The 20-hour course is offered on consecutive Saturdays in June and then again in August.

■ For more information about the CERT program or to sign up for a course, visit www.rowlettcitizencorps.org or e-mail CERT@rowlettcitizencorps.org.



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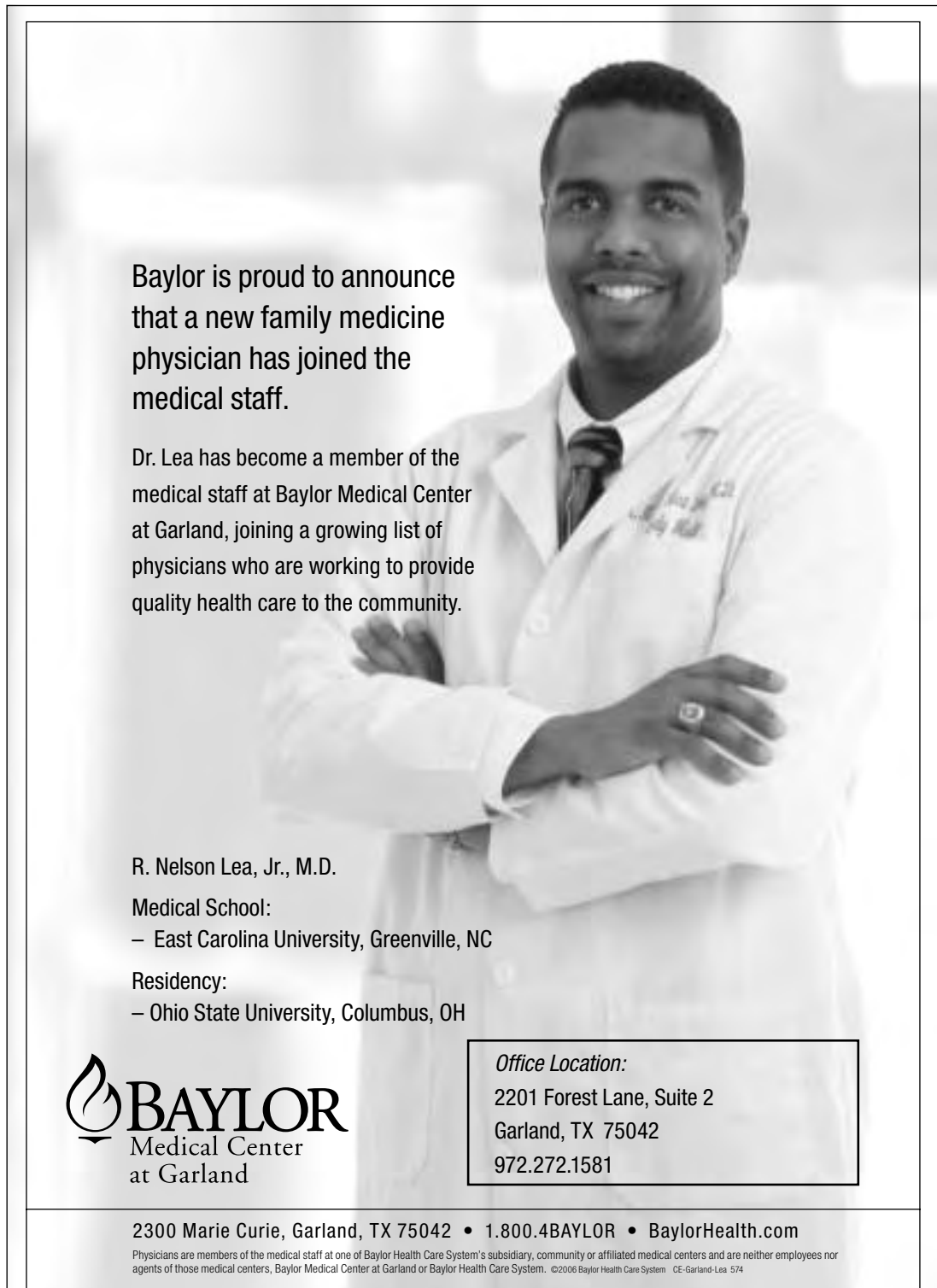
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