

Summer 2020

The Big One

Alexandra Feller '21
Linfield University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.linfield.edu/linfield_magazine

Recommended Citation

Feller, Alexandra '21 (2020) "The Big One," *Linfield Magazine*: Vol. 16 : No. 2 , Article 15.
Available at: https://digitalcommons.linfield.edu/linfield_magazine/vol16/iss2/15

This article is brought to you for free via open access, courtesy of DigitalCommons@Linfield. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@linfield.edu.



THE BIG ONE

By Alexandra Feller '21



earthquakes large and small set off seismographs almost daily on the West Coast. And in Oregon, we're used to the idea that a catastrophic quake isn't a question of "if," but "when."

The Cascadia subduction zone, the 700-mile fault line that stretches from Vancouver Island to Northern California, has sourced devastating quakes in the past — and seismologists say it has a 15 to 20% chance of producing a new one in the next 50 years.

Thanks to its geography, McMinnville has the potential to see major damage from "the Big One." Because of this looming threat, the Federal Emergency Management Agency has stepped up emergency preparation programs in the area. At Linfield, university employees can join these efforts through the campus' Community Emergency Response Team training program.

Linfield's emergency management coordinator, Douglas Cummins, runs the CERT training class twice a year. A 30-year veteran of the McMinnville Police Department, Cummins was in charge of emergency response coordination for the city before he joined Linfield's public safety staff. While a police officer, he created the city's CERT team.

"I'm not an expert by any means, but I am learning from other people in the state about how Linfield can be better," he said.

Under Oregon law, each county is required to have an emergency response plan in case of a disaster like the Big One. The base of operations for Linfield's emergency planning is the university's emergency operations center, located in the Nicholson Library. The center is equipped

with communication equipment and other emergency needs so that first responders can coordinate and allocate supplies across campus when trouble hits.

So far, nearly 40 Linfield faculty or staff have taken the CERT course. The eight-week class covers the basics of disaster preparedness and psychology, emergency medical care, fire safety, and search and rescue. The final includes a role-playing exercise for participants to put their newfound knowledge to work.

Last fall, Linfield joined ShakeAlert, a program that gives it and other West Coast institutions access to an earthquake early warning system.

There are CERT groups all across the U.S. and in several other countries, Cummins said. "I would encourage employees and students to take the course, which is free, to learn more about being personally prepared for any kind of a major event and how they can help others within their community. The training is a national curriculum and can be taken with them wherever they go."

Lisa Goodwin, Linfield's director of annual giving, recently took the class. "You really start to learn the reality of, if a quake happens, we will be cut off," she said.

Linfield may be better prepared than many Oregon colleges and universities if that happens. Last fall, the university joined ShakeAlert, a program that gives Linfield and other West Coast institutions access to an earthquake early warning system developed by the U.S. Geological Survey.

ShakeAlert uses strategically placed underground sensors to monitor tectonic movement and give emergency teams a heads up before a quake hits. Linfield is one of just four educational institutions in the state taking part in the program. The advance warning could be critical if the Big One hits, Cummins said. "Linfield will have anywhere from 10 seconds to two minutes to enact the emergency operations plan."

Even if a big quake doesn't happen for decades, the CERT program has an important role to play, said Goodwin, whose son will be a Linfield freshman in the fall. She remembered a moment when she was walking back to her car after a CERT training. A Linfield parent stopped her to ask if the CERT group was trying to make the campus safer.

"Yes," she said. "We work here but we're doing this on our own time. We're committed to the safety and wellbeing of our students."