

The Sit Rep

Newsletter of the NYC Office of Emergency Management

OEM Tweets, Tags, and Streams



Commissioner Bruno and Facebook Chief Privacy Officer Christopher Kelly launch OEM's Facebook page.

On June 16, OEM launched its presence on three social media sites, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, to connect with New Yorkers in new ways. Facebook alone claims more than two million registered users in New York City. The ability to communicate directly with a quarter of the City's population could revolutionize the way the agency approaches public outreach.

"If New Yorkers come to these sites to gather information, this is where OEM needs to be," Commissioner Bruno said.

In the past, emergency managers relied on traditional media outlets to share information quickly and broadly. The production demands and schedules of traditional media, however, often added a lag time to sharing information. By eliminating the costs and technical expertise required to push information to a large audience, social networks provide a free, direct, and instantaneous alternative for communicating with the public.

This summer, the Centers for Disease Control used Twitter to keep the public updated about the spread of the H1N1 flu virus. The Food and Drug Administration used Twitter to spread the word about a recall of salmonella-tainted pistachio products. Twitter also helped Southern California residents track and report fire movements during the 2007 wildfires.

OEM already uses an emergency notification system called Notify NYC to communicate directly with New Yorkers. Social media networks offer the agency an opportunity to engage residents on a more routine basis, in addition to adding another way to share information during emergencies.

Emergency preparedness training and presentations are major components of OEM's outreach efforts. Social media networks offer both the opportunity to engage a broader audience in these events and a forum to encourage people to share what they learn.

The sharing and overlap of social networks characterizes their real power. As of August 26, 2009, OEM had 1,467 fans on Facebook. Each fan is linked to hundreds (sometimes even thousands) of other people. Every time OEM shares an alert or a preparedness tip with its fans, they automatically share it with their friends through a live bulletin board that tracks what occurs on their networks.

This multiplier effect is inherent to all social media networks. It can propel a single post onto millions of users accounts instantly. For example, when FEMA responded to *American Idol* host Ryan Seacrest's question about an earthquake in Los Angeles on Twitter, Seacrest instantly shared FEMA's message with his two million followers.

Editor's Note

Summer is drawing to a close and OEM staffers are pushing preparedness at street fairs throughout the five boroughs. Be sure to participate in a Ready New York event before September 14th so you can join the External Affairs staff on the Intrepid for the biennial Partners in Preparedness reception.

The summer heat, the Hudson Aviation Incident, and a close call with Hurricane Bill has kept the agency buzzing the last few weeks, but the main focus of the summer has been planning for the return of the H1N1 virus this fall. Check back for an update on the City's flu strategies in the next issue.

This issue of the Sit Rep introduces OEM's social media revolution. Read all about how the agency is tweeting, tagging, and streaming its way into the future.

Also in this issue, Johanna Conroy gives a first person account of OEM's leap into the world of Dragon Boating.

Smile at the babies, swoon for the engagement stories, and, as always, send me an email if you have an idea for the next issue.

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OEM Tweets, Tags, and Streams

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In addition to providing a direct link to residents, social media networks can enhance an agency's situational awareness during an emergency. OEM has become New York City's emergency information hub for both City agencies and residents. During any major incident, OEM gathers, vets, and distributes emergency information and updates it as the situation changes. But reliable information is sometimes difficult to acquire.

"At the start of a job, the thing we always struggle with is trying to wrap our arms around the information," said Mike Lee, director of OEM Watch Command. "The dueling pressures of speed on one hand and accuracy on the other make sharing information a real challenge."

Social media sites use technology to transform media consumers into media creators and collaborators. They re-organize the flow of information from a single source into a conversation among all interested parties. Suddenly and directly, users can question and correct information provided by any official source.

Some public safety officials avoid social media because of concerns about rumors and misinformation. Such concerns may be valid when examining independent posts, but the remarkable thing about Twitter is that it is often self-correcting. Like Wikipedia, Twitter's accuracy stems from large numbers of genuinely interested individuals monitoring and verifying posts.

"[During] disasters information seeking is intensified," said Jeannette Sutton, research associate at the Natural Hazards Center at the University of Colorado at Boulder, at the 2009 World Conference of Disaster Management. "People will look for information, and if it's not coming fast enough or isn't perceived as being accurate they look somewhere else. We discovered that many people who went online for information found that there was misinformation coming from the public authorities and from major media."

"In contrast, many of these information seekers had access to information that was accurate at the local level, so they provided that information as a corrective. That was a very interesting thing to find out: that there was a perception that the locals were more accurate than the authorities."

The idea of the wisdom of the masses has been continually tested and validated since the turn of the century. Whether in scientific studies or entertainment programs like *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire*, the average answer from a group of individuals consistently outperforms answers by experts.

OEM has no immediate plans to leverage the tweets of average New Yorkers to increase the City's situational awareness, but joining these conversations may be the agency's best option to control and correct misinformation. Rumors and conjecture abound in the absence of an official message.

Commissioner's Corner



1. As a life-long New Yorker, what are your favorite things about NYC in the summer? Do you have any summertime traditions?

When the weather gets warm, New Yorkers of all kinds and interests hit the streets and provide the real beauty and complexity of this great city. The Bruno family has its traditional family reunion each summer! Sorry I can't tell you where as I could not afford the food bill.

2. This issue highlights OEM's new social media outreach. Do you use any social networking sites?

I have become fascinated with Facebook, which appears to have terrific capacity to share information with ease and control. While I am not a heavy user of Facebook, I do like to look in and see how OEM's page is doing. Sign up as an OEM fan!

3. Any lessons learned from Hurricane Bill?

Hurricane Bill threatened NYC as it came up the eastern seaboard. We were fortunate, but it reinforced the need to monitor weather as soon as any signs of storm development arise. In the case of Bill, all indicators advised us that it would stay far out in the ocean. But coastal erosion, rip tides and massive wave action were consequences we predicted and warned residents about. I guess the lesson learned is that OEM folks are pretty good prognosticators when it comes to hurricanes.

Wedding Bells



A number of OEMers popped or were popped "the question" this quarter. Here are their engagement stories.

Craig Bonney proposed to fiancée Stephany Krauz from the deck of a Circle Line cruise ship floating in the Hudson River below the grand finale of the July 4th fireworks show. "Getting her on there without suspecting that something was going on was the hardest part," Craig said. Craig and Stephany will be married on May 30, 2010, at Bobby's, right down the street.

Carmela Morada got engaged to David Hinderaker on April 25, 2009. "It was a Saturday. He told me that he was going to Montreal for a bachelor party. I was hanging out with a friend for the day," Carmela explained. "Throughout the day, I received cards from him telling me to go to certain places (i.e., clothing store, restaurant, spa). It was sort of like a scavenger hunt. I finally met him at Blue Hill Farm in Westchester County. He propped outside and afterwards we had a two-and-a-half hour dinner." Carmela and David plan to get married in August 2010 in Portland, Maine.



Onofrio DeMattia was engaged to Apollonia Novello on July 28, 2009. "We were out to dinner on our second anniversary at Coco Roco on Smith Street in Brooklyn," OJ said. "It was the same place she and I had gone on our first date. All she kept saying was how perfect of an evening it was...until I told her it is not really that perfect. The only thing that would really make the night perfect is if she said yes. She had a confused look on her face, then I dropped to a knee in the restaurant and, of course, she said yes." OJ and Apollonia are looking to tie the knot in April 2011.

Herman Schaffer and Kathleen McFarland were engaged on August 1, 2009. The details are a closely guarded secret...

OEM NEWS

OEM Honors Founding Father of Emergency Management



On August 3, OEM honored Carmin G. Novis, the first director of the Emergency Control Board, and his family during a reception in the lobby.

Mayor John Lindsay created the Office of Emergency Control Board-Civil Defense on September 11, 1967. The office was responsible for developing and implementing a disaster management system to enable the City to respond to all types of disasters.

Throughout his career, Mr. Novis coordinated planning efforts that mirror the current activities at OEM. He foresaw the need for things like an EOC, a COOP program, and extensive community outreach and training to harness the power of volunteers during and emergency.

The first report of the City's Emergency Control Board, along with a number of emergency management related historical documents

from New York City's past are now available on the common drive: W:\Common\Historical Documents and Reports.

Disaster Networks Take Center Stage in D.C.

On August 11, Alec Glucksman presented a plan to help CERT teams throughout the country create community disaster networks at the National Conference on Community Preparedness in Washington, D.C.

New York City CERT creates community disaster networks to learn about the demographics of a community and engage its leaders in emergency preparedness and response.

The conference featured speakers from around the country and covered topics from engaging elected leaders to harnessing volunteers for emergencies. The four day conference was hosted by the International Association of Emergency Managers and FEMA.

Frank Lowe Honored by Mayor Bloomberg



On July 30, Mayor Bloomberg launched NYC Civic Corps to mobilize New Yorkers to volunteer and address the City's greatest challenges. The

Mayor recognized Frank Lowe, OEM's Senior Outreach Specialist, for his work preparing New Yorkers for emergencies at the event.

GIS Shares Crisis Management Insight with China

The June issue of Archinect magazine featured an interview with GIS' Jim McConnell in an article entitled "Post-Disaster Reconstruction and Crisis Management." Jim discussed the role maps and geo-spatial data can play in visualizing and disseminating data quickly, accurately, and efficiently during moments of duress. Check out his interview on page 11 of Archinect magazine: W:\Common\GIS

Baby Squirrels Rescued at OEM Headquarters

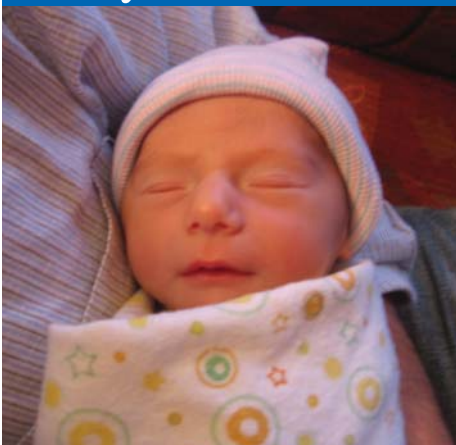
On August 25, Amanda Hayde, Paula Carlson, Rita Nardella, and Robert Van Pelt coordinated the rescue of two baby squirrels outside of OEM headquarters.

Rita reported the job and provided the situational awareness. Paula and Amanda collected the squirrels in a box while Robert used his contacts on the Animal Planning Task Force to invite an official from Animal Care and Control (ACC).

The five-week-old squirrels will be bottle-fed and cared for by staff at ACC until they reach 12 weeks, when they will be released.



Baby Boom



Adam Timur Sulaymanov
5 lbs, 8 oz

Born August 3, 2009, to Rachel and Shuhrat Sulaymanov



Jase Christian Ivan Williams
9 lbs, 6 ozs

Born May 29, 2009, to Ival Grant-Williams and Sigmund Williams



Jake Hudson Van de Kieft
9 lbs, 3 oz

Born July 4, 2009, to Jennifer and Chris Van de Kieft

Racing Dragons



Team OEM competes in the 2009 Corona Park Dragon Boat Race.

The Sit Rep sat down with Johanna Conroy of OEM's 2009 Dragon Boat team to get the inside scoop about the team, the race, and the dramatic finish. Here's the story in her words:

I don't know why I decided to join OEM's Dragon Boat team. I'm usually not a joiner. When I saw the announcement about the race, it involved so many new and unfamiliar things and it seemed so unique to New York, I decided I had to get involved.

This was the first year OEM put a Dragon Boat team together and I was excited and a little nervous about joining the team. I arrived at Flushing Meadows Corona Park early the Sunday of our first practice and saw 12 OEMers standing around the boat house. The group was incredibly diverse. It seemed like there was a representative from every unit at OEM. Many of us were meeting each other for the first time.

When we first saw the boat, my heart sunk. It looked nothing like the majestic craft featured in the flyer. It had two inches of water in the bottom and it seemed too narrow and flimsy for two people to sit side-by-side. I veiled my skepticism and grabbed a paddle and a wet, mildewed life-jacket from the garbage bins and climbed aboard.

There were 12 of us in the boat: 10 paddlers, a drummer up front, and a navigator on the rudder in the back. I was sitting in the front row next to Darlene Moore from Watch Command. I had a clear view of Kiran Dhanji from Logistics as she perched behind the drum and tried to keep us from smashing our paddles into each other by giving directions in as diplomatic a way as possible (with mixed results). We all learned over the course of the next practices that the drummer has to channel their inner drill sergeant and Kiran came through for us.

Coordinating paddlers is a tough job. I thought we could just match the strokes of the person in front of us, but some people take longer strokes than others and fatigue sets in at different times. During that first practice it took us about 20 minutes to run the course that should have taken under five. We looked like a centipede having a seizure on the water.

One month and four practices later, I donned my uniform, a black t-shirt emblazoned with a dragon head OEM logo designed by Thomas Pollman of GIS. When I arrived at a park, I barely recognized it. Booths, tents, stages, and streamers transformed a normally forgettable park into a beautiful festival. Each team had its own tent and Christian Quintanilla from CERT had organized a feast for us.

We looked like a centipede having a seizure.

The most impressive transformation, however, was that of the boats themselves. They'd been painted and decorated to look like the majestic dragons I recalled from the poster. A fanged and snarling dragon head perched on the front of each boat. We even got better paddles and non-mildewed life-jackets. It was on!

We'd come together as a team during the last few practices and we were eager to see how we matched up against the other boats. Some of us stretched and jogged to warm up, while others engaged in some high-spirited trash talking to intimidate our opponents.

We were registered to race in the Municipal League, which means we were only competing against teams from other City agencies and the offices of elected

officials. The Department of Buildings, dressed in light blue, waited on one side, while the New York State Chinese Auxiliary Police, dressed in gold, stood ready on the other.

The race flag went up and everyone assumed the ready position, arms straight out in front and paddles dangling just above the water. The referee counted down from five, and, at the sound of a bullhorn, we were off.

We had the pace of the first three strokes planned ahead of time. These were the most important strokes because everyone has to work together to get the boat moving straight from a standstill. Then we really turned it on. Kiran screamed "PULL!" and beat the drum to signal the beginning of a stroke, and Adam Morrow, the helmsman from Planning, answered "UP!" to mark the finish.

The wind was pushing us around and I could tell Adam was working hard to keep us on course. A big orange ball marked the finish, but I was so focused on paddling that I didn't have time to look around during the race. All I could see is that we weren't falling behind.

When we passed the buoy, everyone cheered. I knew we'd done well, but I didn't realize how well. We finished the race in two minutes on the same course that took us 20 minutes during the first practice. Out of seven teams, we finished fourth, ahead of the Fire Department and behind the Department of Buildings.

A number of OEMers and families came out to cheer us on and we all celebrated with a cookout. Unfortunately, soon after the race, many of our team members were called into the Sit Room to work the Hudson River Aviation Incident. Luckily we had time to congratulate each other and make plans for next year. I'll miss our weekly Sunday practices, but I'm looking forward to a bigger and better Dragon Boat team next year.

Racing Dragons

Team OEM competes in the 2009 Dragon Boat Race in Corona Park

