

Sunday December 9, 2007
THE OPINION OF THE RGJ EDITORIAL BOARD

Contractors Auxiliary rates celebration on anniversary

We in the Truckee Meadows learned a lot of lessons from the New Year's Flood of 1997.

One of the most important: There were a lot of resources available in the region to respond to an emergency, if only officials knew how to tap into them.

So, out of the swath of destruction left behind when the Truckee River and Steamboat Creek overflowed their banks came the Contractors Auxiliary, which celebrates its 10th anniversary Wednesday with festivities from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. at the Associated General Contractors

SNAPSHOT

TOPIC: Emergency response

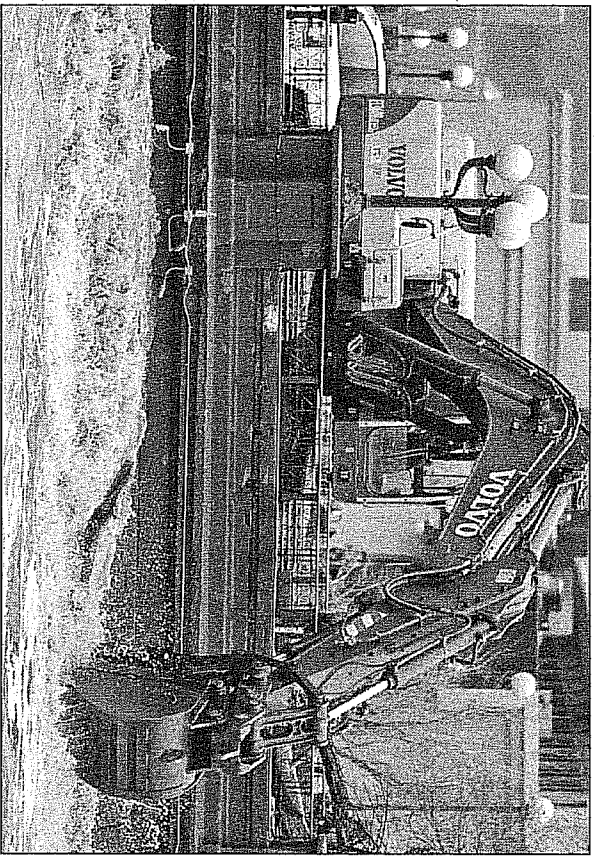
OUR VIEW: The organization began 10 years ago in the wake of the destructive New Year's Flood of 1997.

General Contractors building, 5400 Mill St., Reno. The need for an organization such as the auxiliary is

obvious, even if it had been given little thought before the 1997 flood. The area's contractors have the equipment — bulldozers, front-end loaders, earth movers, water trucks, you name it — and the personnel who know how to use it. They also have the experts: engineers, architects, construction managers.

Yet, when contractors' employees began arriving at the scene of the flooding in 1997 and volunteered to help in the response, law enforcement officers turned them away. There was no mechanism at the time for taking advantage of the volunteers, they hadn't been trained, communications were limited, and red tape got in the way.

Simply moving heavy equipment on the area's streets and roads was a problem. There were state regulations



LIZ MERGERMAN/RENO GAZETTE-JOURNAL FILE

The Washoe County Sheriff's Office created an official auxiliary that could be called on in emergencies, such as the Flood of 1997 in Reno. Volunteers go through emergency training, and lines of communication are in place.

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to be dealt with, permits to be obtained, and no one had thought about how to cut through that red tape in an emergency.

The solution was for the Washoe County Sheriff's Office to create an official auxiliary that could be called on in emergencies. Volunteers go through the appropriate emergency training, and lines of communication are in place. (Agencies are charged break-even rental rates for the equipment and operators.)

The program has demonstrated its value numerous times over the past 10 years, perhaps most dramatically during the Truckee Meadows' most

recent flood, on the final day of 2005. In the middle of the night, members of the Contractors Auxiliary brought equipment to downtown Reno and began plucking logs out of the river that could have created a dam at the city's bridges and sent water rushing through downtown again. The quick work was credited with preventing the flood from becoming much more destructive.

Members also assisted with the response to the Hawken Fire this past summer, turning its water trucks loose on the fire.

So successful has the program been that it's been copied in other areas of the country, including in nearby Douglas County.

Everyone involved in the program, from the contractors to the sheriff's department, deserves praise for seeing a critical need and filling it.

It's an idea worth emulating. It's certainly an idea worth celebrating on its 10th anniversary.