

Residents urged to register with

BY LADONNA BEEKER
THE JOURNAL

OONEE COUNTY — If caregivers and distant relatives worry about leaving an elderly parent or family member with special medical needs alone at home for fear of an emergency situation, Oconee County has an answer.

AlertOconee, which became official almost a year ago, offers a reverse 9-1-1 system. In the event of an emergency, such as a gas leak, natural disaster or manhunt, residents in an identified area will be contacted in order to either evacuate their homes or be on the lookout to assist law enforcement.

Currently, AlertOconee has all AT&T county landlines entered into the database without a resident having to register. However, the online registration form allows residents to enter a cell phone, as well as additional contacts, such as distant family members to be contacted in the event of an evacuation.

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Outside of the listed and nonlisted AT&T numbers, 544 contacts have been made manually on the AlertOconee website.

"When people read about reverse 9-1-1, many will say, 'We don't need to register for that. It will never happen,'" said Del Collings, Special Medical Needs Task Force volunteer. "We hope it never does happen, but the program is free and only takes five minutes to sign up. So my answer to them is 'Why not sign up?' If we never need to use it, we can consider ourselves very lucky, but if such a need arises, I think our residents will be glad to have their information in the system."

Oconee County Sheriff's Office

operates AlertOconee by gathering information and creating an automated recording that will alert residents in the reverse 9-1-1 call to the situation and what action needs to be taken.

Recently, AlertOconee was used to evacuate 75 residents. Of those 75, within 20 minutes, AlertOconee successfully reached 56 residents and those individuals started leaving. In addition, four of those 75 residents had special medical needs, so Oconee County rescue personnel used ambulances to evacuate those individuals.

"It was a very successful operation," said EMS responder Wayne Garland, who joined other personnel in going to the homes of 19

people who could not be reached.

Other possible uses for AlertOconee are for lost children or geriatric patients. Garland said law enforcement officials, once their efforts have been exhausted, could utilize the system to alert one neighborhood at a time to look out for a lost individual.

HOW TO REGISTER

Visit www.Alertoconee.com and register as a new user. An email address and password will be needed. However, Garland said many people do not have an email address, so one is created for the sole use of AlertOconee. Garland said the email address and password should be kept in

AlertOconee

clear sight to make updates to the account.

Once the email address and password are established, the system will ask for a person's name, physical address and two phone numbers. The system accepts landline phones and cell phone numbers. If users check the box by the cell phone number, AlertOconee can also send a user a text message.

A registered user then has the option of entering other contact individuals who might live in other cities or states.

Garland reminds users to always put their physical Oconee County address when the system requests an address. If a different address is used in the alternate contacts, the system will not know this is a person to contact.

For more information or to request assistance in registering for AlertOconee, call Oconee County Emergency Services at (864) 638-4200.