

Bright



[Jon McNamara ('05)]

Disaster relief all in a day's work

BY AMELIA WOOD ('13)

Sweat drips down the brow of Jonathan McNamara ('05) as he sits in his 90-plus-degree office contemplating another sleepless night on a cheap cot smashed into the corner. Another phone call, another meeting, another media interview. Even when the proverbial smoke has cleared from a natural disaster, McNamara's job is only beginning. Hired this past spring as the regional director of donor and media relations for the American Red Cross in Richmond, Va., McNamara spent many nights in his office in the aftermath of the August 2011 earthquake and Hurricane Irene.

Starting in March, McNamara walked into the Red Cross position right as Virginia was experiencing the most tornadoes in one season in the commonwealth's history. The tornadoes were only a precursor of the summer to come, yet McNamara says the actions he had to take after the August earthquake

and Hurricane Irene, relief efforts seemed almost natural after such an intense welcome.

For much of the spring, his office operated its essential electronics on a backup generator. McNamara's job was to restore order and deliver supplies to as many people as possible. But, his duties far exceed giving out blankets and bottles of water. He also serves as an external constituent liaison and provides legislative assistance for lobbying bills.

"After a disaster hits we have a responsibility to communicate ... and also to get local business support," says McNamara. Of course, he always looks forward to the end of any disaster cleanup, but he knows that marks the time when the Red Cross focuses on preparing for the next disaster.

During his first few months as director of the American Red Cross office in Richmond, Jon McNamara helped Virginians overcome a rash of tornadoes, Hurricane Irene's wrath and an earthquake.

Highlights

*The professors, students
and alumni who shine in
Madison's constellation*

When Red Cross teams aren't preparing, they are reflecting on what they have gone through so they can "do the job better," McNamara explains. "JMU's School of Media Arts and Design really enabled me," he insists. "Other university programs hyper focus you, yet SMAD professors and classes prepare you for an ever-changing media environment."

After graduating from JMU, McNamara worked for L-3 Communications/SY Coleman. "We brought some color to the black and white of government contracting," he says. And with the help of fellow SMAD graduate Brian King ('05), McNamara helped form a partnership between SMAD and L-3 for internship and scholarship opportunities. After L-3, McNamara moved to Richmond to work for Patient Services Inc. to help patients with chronic illnesses. He then served as director of storytelling for Media Bond, a video production firm that helps companies, mostly nonprofits, to create advertisements and public service announcements.

McNamara keeps close ties with fellow JMU alumni, not only to network, but also to help him serve the Red Cross effectively and efficiently. His acquaintance with a Richmond-



After the proverbial smoke has cleared from a disaster, Jon McNamara's job is just beginning. The American Red Cross regional director directs staff in his office – and sometimes catches a nap after sleepless days.

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– JONATHAN MCNAMARA ('05) *regional director of donor and media relations for the American Red Cross in Richmond, Va.*

in 'networking is everything,'" he says. His Madison Experience and career path prepared him to meet the challenges of a demanding Red Cross job. "SMAD prepares you to wear many hats and accomplish anything," he says. **MI**

* Learn more at <http://virginiacapitalredcross.org>

based JMU photography alumnus allows him to maximize his budget since the Red Cross relies heavily on volunteers.

McNamara also works with Sarah Pine ('11), a recent SMAD graduate who concentrated in corporate communications. She works in the public relations sector of the Red Cross.

"I'll do anything I can to help other alumni," says McNamara, who serves as president of the Richmond Chapter of the Duke Club. He also enjoys helping area youth. He is the public addresser for Powhatan County Public Schools and works with teachers to involve students in media coverage of athletics events. McNamara modestly attributes this volunteer effort to SMAD as well. He minored in sports communication and wrote athletics features for the JMU Sports Media Relations office.

McNamara's enthusiasm for JMU's School of Media Arts and Design fuels his desire to promote the program. "I'm a big believer