west coast WOMAN

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Kat McKell

In 1994 she cofounded the Manateens, a youth service organization that has grown to nearly 10,000 students. Since her Manateen days McKell has nearly finished putting herself through college and expanded her already formidable array of skills through continued volunteering. Today, at 24, she works full time, goes to school full time and volunteers nearly 30 hours a week. "I think of my life in different shifts," McKell explains. "And there's always my Manateens."

McKell credits heredity for some of her altruism and energy. "We're known for our very strong women," she says.

Manatee County Emergency Operations has asked Kat McKell to help develop a Volunteer Contingency Plan. They'd better stand back and hold on. McKell is the young woman who, in 1994, cofounded the Manateens.

A youth service organization, the group has grown from a few teenagers trying to be useful to nearly 10,000 participating students. They have earned numerous awards and national attention helping county agencies and residents especially seniors. In the process the teens find self esteem, friends, and often grants and scholarships toward their college education.

Since her own Manateen days McKell has nearly finished putting herself through college and expanded her already formidable array of skills largely through continued volunteering. Today, at 24, she works full time, goes to school full time and volunteers nearly 30 hours a week. "I think of my life in different shifts," McKell explains. "And there's always my Manateens. I still chaperone trips and do volunteer seminars."

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Aids Council she learned enough about emergency financial relief to "keep the lights on" for her clients. With the Deaf Service Center she earned a powerful 7 out of 10 "hit rate" for successful grant writing. She's also been a mandated reporter (of suspected child abuse) and the official "good touch bad touch, don't go with strangers lady" for the Manatee Children's Center.

Always a willing to make the call or be the speaker or try her hand at a computer program, McKell has acquired strengths far beyond her years. With so many interests, she acknowledges, "I run the risk all the time of being a mile wide and an inch deep." So far all is well. Her grades are excellent. "I'm very focused in class," she says. "I have to drink it all in because I just don't have a lot of time to review later."

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ways than he knew. "I love science and I'm pretty good in it, but I'd rather deal with people." Today she is about to receive a degree in International Public Relations from the University of South Florida.

Her current full-time job with Selective HR Solutions (a PEO or professional employment organization) meshes well with her changed major and her volunteer activities. McKell produces an electronic newsletter for the company and works on their community relations projects.

For the county she will be partnering with the Red Cross to assemble a database of largely non-governmental contacts and resources available in an emergency. What corporation, for instance, stands ready to donate 100 gallons of water if needed and who will be on call to deliver them to a feeding station? Eventually, all the information could appear on a McKell designed web site. Or perhaps her second electronic newsletter.

For McKell the idea of citizens participating in a community project is irresistible. Active Manateens get to meet many types of people and solve problems that don't occur in a typical school setting. They learn to value one another for their efforts not their



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