



The Official Newsletter of GPSAR

RESCUE ME

Greater Philadelphia Search & Rescue

Proudly Serving PA, NJ, DE & MD since 1977 · www.gpsar.org

When a person is lost or endangered, seconds can mean the difference between life and death. Fortunately, there is available, a dedicated search and rescue group - Greater Philadelphia Search And Rescue (GPSAR).

Founded in 1979, GPSAR has a primary response area within the States of Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Delaware, however, GPSAR has been requested by, and responds to missions in other States as well.

OVER 30 YEARS OF SERVICE

In 1977 a well meaning group of volunteers got together and founded the Greater Philadelphia Emergency Radio Team and we have grown in size and service since then. With the humble beginnings as a member of REACT International , Greater Philadelphia Search and Rescue is celebrating it's 30th year. We are still a member of REACT International and also the Pennsylvania Search and Rescue Council as well as the New Jersey Search and rescue Council.

In the early years of our existence the need for

an area search team was identified and acted upon. Development of field search teams and later a K-9 unit began the growth of our resources to the community . The development of a bike unit and a water unit was soon to follow. We began with just a handful of members and today we have over. Even though the membership has changed throughout the years the commitment and dedication has not waived. We can count on average 12-14 members on any call out being ready to perform several skills

sets to meet the needs of challenge at hand.

During the past year , the volunteer members of GPSAR has served the community on 13 calls for help , a dozen community events and numerous youth education/outreach programs. We hope to continue our services to the community for the next 30 years as we support each other in safety and service.

Education / Outreach / Searches

Other ways we help

Our volunteer members have been very busy this year. Since January 1, we have been involved in 13 searches, both locally and in the surrounding counties. We have traveled to northern Pa and southern New Jersey and places in between.

Team members have also been busy with educating

our youth on how not to get lost and how to stay safe while they are out and about. Take your Child to Work day was enhanced with presentations at Johnson & Johnson , Glaxo – Smith-Klien and other area businesses. Our team presented Lost in the Woods program to the youth attending the Junior

Rangers Camp at Hibernia County Park back in July . As of this printing of the newsletter our team is getting ready for October's Annual Fire Prevention Week. Members will be representing the team at area open houses at local Fire Companies.

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HOW FAR WE'VE COME

How far have we come in 30 years?. We have gone from a local communications team with REACT to a leading resource to the Greater Philadelphia area and beyond. Expanding the radios has been a priority as we now are mobile and GPS enabled. We started as a member of REACT International and now we have added PSARC and NJSAR.

When we first began searches would be

planned off the hood of a car. We now have a mobile unit affectionately called 'the bus'. It can transport 12 people and be command ready on location with radio and computer capacity. It can hold mountain bikes and stokes baskets. People and gear with work stations accessible at a moments notice. Amazing!



Training picture from the late 90's



This picture shows some of the growth over the past few years.



TRAINING TOPICS

Training Never Stops

GPSAR is serious about training. We gather twice a week to hone our skills at various locations throughout the area. Variety is the key to training a good team. In order to service the community in any emergency search our members cross train in many areas. We have a strong K-9 division with 6 certified dog teams and another dozen in various stages of training.

We currently have 7 attending the PA Fish and Boat Commission Water Rescue Phase 1 who will join 5 who are currently certified to make an even stronger

water rescue unit.

Patient packaging ,rigging and knots have been worked on as well as map and compass skills. Most of our members are first Aid and CPR certified as well as AED trained. Many members are looking forward to attaining their Field Team Member certification this October from the DCNR

Always keep these questions in mind when doing your job...

- Who do I serve?
- Why am I here?
- How can I help?
- What do I add?

In Our Opinion:

The Greater Good

Why are we here? Not in the whole meaning of life aspect, but why are we in Search? Our motto is 'so that others may live'. We need to remember that. Yes it is quite noble and upstanding and looks real glamorous on your resume', but we need to remember that basic

principle. It has no qualifying remark like 'only if you are a child will I search for you ". It does not say "if I get there first I get the prize". It does not say "screw the next guy because I have my own agenda". Just as each individual on each team has to work together for

the safety and well being of each other, each team has to work together for the greater good of the search. Putting aside personal issues is an additional skill for any member of any team. We all need to practice this skill.

"It's easy to make a buck. It's a lot tougher to make a difference."

Product Reviews

ID Technology In SAR



The intrusion of unauthorized personnel into a search-and-rescue operation can steal precious minutes and take the eyes of rescuers off the main goal - to save lives. "When a person is lost or endangered, seconds can mean the difference between life and death," says Chief Mark Hopkins, Greater Philadelphia Search and Rescue (GPSAR). "That's why the use of ID cards is so important for scene safety and identification."

"Fortunately, I can recall only two situations when someone misrepresented themselves as a member of our team," Hopkins adds. "The one that stands out was at a search for a missing autistic boy when a woman put on colors that matched our uniform and outfitted her dog appropriately. In the confusion, she disappeared into the woods. There is always the possibility of something of this nature happening during the chaos of a large operation, but the ID system helps to

reduce the possibility of someone going undetected. I have found that having the IDs displayed prominently makes other agencies take notice and pay attention to the lack of an ID on someone."

The GPSAR is a non-profit organization that relies on 40 dedicated volunteers to respond to search requests in Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Delaware. Founded in 1979, GPSAR volunteers are on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week, engaging in rescue operations in the wilderness or urban areas, in caves or on ice, in water or in collapsed structures. Their mission is to respond so "That Others May Live."

Identifying authorized individuals on the scene of a search-and-rescue is important. Up until 2006, GPSAR had been issuing ID cards printed on glossy photo paper and laminating them one at a time. Because the ID cards used in search-and-rescue operations are often exposed to the elements, including icy water, they must be durable. Administrators wanted something more long-lasting and more professional than their handmade cards.

Being familiar with card printers from Fargo Electronics, Eden Prairie,

Minn., Hopkins asked one of his officers to contact the company. Hopkins chose the Fargo Persona C30 Card Printer, based on his need for support, reliability and available supplies.

The machine is designed so that the ribbon cartridge also contains the card cleaning roller, thus simplifying the cleaning process. This was an important consideration for GPSAR. "Choosing a new printer involved matching the product with our needs and budget and also the price of the consumables," Hopkins says. Consumables include ribbons, blank cards and overlaminates materials.

ID cards are typically printed from a laptop computer in the GPSAR office. They are double-sided, combining graphics with photos.

"Eventually we'll have different IDs for people based on their status within the team. The obvious choice is different colored cards. Right now, we have it broken down with a simple title above the name for clarification. We also are working on equipment tags," Hopkins says.

GPSAR is also going to produce tags for its rescue dogs. Dogs play a large part in many rescue operations, using their keen sense of smell to follow the scent of a missing person. Introducing distracting scents from other dogs can severely inhibit the work of the rescue animals.

"Our animal partners play an

incredible role in our team," Hopkins says. "The mere presence of a professional looking handler and canine helps to comfort the family of a missing person in many cases. The animals help us by dramatically narrowing the area and covering more area faster. While they don't eliminate the need for other tactics, they supplement them nicely. Identification of these animals is important so we can see their qualifications at a glance."

"We have had problems in the past with unauthorized people on the scene of a search," says Jennifer Christian, GPSAR team secretary. "We can now make ID cards on the spot, if necessary."