

Volunteer heroes ready with a lifeline

By Jose L. Medina Sun-News reporter

Las Cruces Sun-News Article

Launched:01/22/2007 01:00:00 AM MST

LAS CRUCES — "Give me some slack." The instruction echoed off the canyon walls as a group of area residents honed their skills in preparation for the moment when the phone rings, calling them into action.

The Organ Mountain Technical Rescue Squad is one of four search and rescue teams in Doña Ana County. Its specialty is technical-rope rescues, as well as search-and-rescue operations on rocky, rugged terrain, some of the most challenging available on a recognizable southern New Mexico landmark — the Organ Mountains.



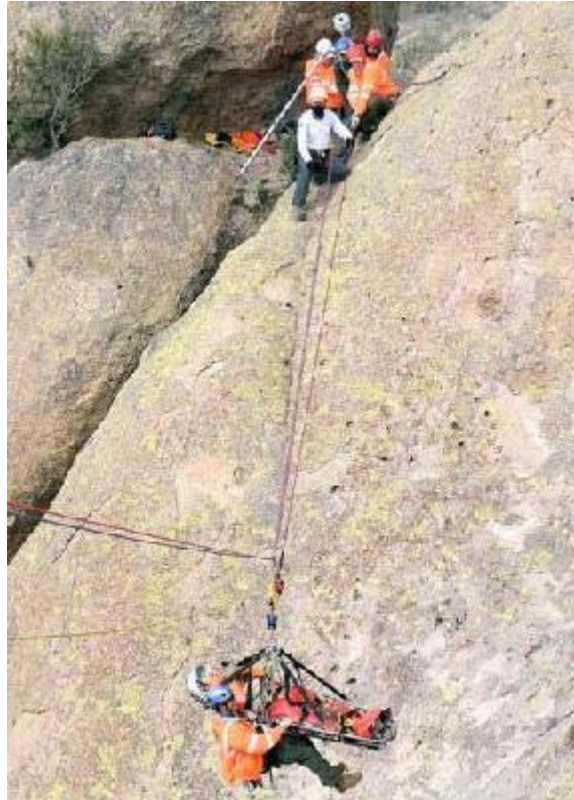
"Obviously, we like doing this kind of stuff," said rescue squad member Sue Williams. "We are totally volunteers. When we get called out, we get called out."

On Sunday, the all-volunteer group, with upwards of 15 members, held one of its training sessions, demonstrating what the squad can do and has done.

"There is some (risk) involved. Everyone is supposed to be taking care of someone else," said squad member David Toledo.

Toledo spoke while standing on a rock formation towering more than a hundred feet high at La Cueva, an area at the base of the Organ Mountains, east of Las Cruces. In the canyon below, two

other team members readied themselves to be lifted to safety in a simulation of the type of rescue event the squad may be called to.



"It looks dangerous, but we are careful," Toledo said.

Rescue-squad members come from all walks of life, and its members understand that the call for help could come at any time.

Williams said team members are aware the call may not come at the most convenient of times, but as she explains, it's something rescue squad members are willing to accept.

"Because there is a need. It could be me. It could be your mother — the person that's lost is important and we have the technical expertise to do it," she said.

Recent events have pointed to the importance of such teams.

Last week, 52-year-old Carolyn Dorn was found weak, but alive, after five weeks of wandering in the Gila wilderness.

Last month, three climbers were lost on Oregon's Mount Hood. One climber has since been found dead. The other two remain missing and the search-and-rescue effort to find them has been scaled back to a search-and-recovery effort.

Coincidentally, Sunday's training was the one-year anniversary that hit closer to home.

On Jan. 21 of last year, New Mexico State University piano instructor Melba Halamicek lost her life while hiking in an area not far from where the rescue squad trained Saturday. It's just one of the search operations that members of the rescue squad remember well.



The squad was also involved in the operations to recover the body of 21-year-old Richard Odom, an NMSU student who died while hiking on the Organs in April 2005.

Jose Medina can be reached at jmedina@lcsun-news.com

On the Net

For more on the Organ Mountain Technical Rescue Squad and for information on how to join, visit www.omtrs.org. Volunteer heroes ready with a lifeline

http://www.lcsun-news.com/ci_5059477