



October 2007

The Meridian

Two weeks ago, I had started this issue of my newsletter but something that brought home the realities of our work happened. A week ago, myself and my team, Tacoma Mountain Rescue, were intimately involved in the search and recovery of a plane crash where ten humans perished. The scene was horrific and I could have never imagined it would have looked the way it did. Although this event has been traumatic to those involved and emotions have been on a rollercoaster, it was also an incredible experience to be a part of.

While the scene was extremely difficult, the volunteers who left their homes, jobs, families and friends to respond carried out the work in the most serious and professional manner. At the scene, we had over 42 folks from 9 different teams working with one purpose; to make the recovery happen as quickly as possible for the waiting families and friends of the victims. I, truly, have never been as proud to be a member of the MRA as I was at that mission. Never a complaint or negative comment was heard, members from all teams looked out for each other with true care, respect was ever-present for those who had passed and their survivors, and long hours of hard work were completed in the timeframe for which we had hoped.

In the following days, the care and friendships continued as teams and members checked on each other's health and well-being. Now, a week after, all teams have held Critical Incident Stress Debriefs. Some have started healing the emotional wounds and some will need more time. But, all know that they have an extended family that has shared this event and the support and concern continues until all have healed.

My husband, Jeff, and I talked about how to prepare our team members for future missions like this one. Will those involved be better prepared or hold back a bit and reflect on this past mission? Can we de-sensitize our emotions so we can mentally get through these times? Each person is unique and will certainly have their own way to cope. For me, I have decided that I am not the type to distance myself from the emotions. I want to feel the profound fear, grief and yes, gratification that was involved with this mission. It may affect me a bit more, but it keeps me very human.

On a similar thread, Howard Paul recently brought an article to the Lister regarding the harsh criticisms launched at search subjects in the media and on blogs. The article had a refreshing and different take on SAR cost recovery and it feels even more pertinent now. After experiencing the event above, my mind focuses on the single most important reason we go a mission. Compassion. It is not for the often media mentioned "adrenaline rush". We know better. Most times it is long days of hard work where we may not even see the

eventually found subject. It's not to show our technical rigging prowess, prove our physical fitness nor share in the camaraderie of our friends. No, I would guess it is our great compassion for our fellow human beings that drives us out of bed in the middle of the night and into the wilderness to help whoever is in need. For those of us who know this, we have to laugh at the efforts to charge for a rescue. It is simply impossible to assign a value or cost to that compassion. Although our organization will continue the effort to address the SAR cost recovery debate, I ask each one of you this. Never underestimate *the value of your compassion* to your subject, their family, your team and the MRA.

Now to some business. First, congratulations are in order for Portland Mountain Rescue celebrating their 30th Anniversary and Rocky Mountain Rescue Group who celebrates their 60th! Also, I recently saw a Court TV show that featured our friends up at Sitka Mountain Rescue. A fascinating show where the professional work of this team was essential to the solving of a difficult murder investigation. Great work and thanks to all!

The summer seemed a bit slow on issues but your Officers continued to work on a variety of items. We have begun to hold conference calls every other month to stay in touch and communicate more effectively. In August, I attended the Outdoor Retailer Show in Salt Lake City. Meg Fogg, Fundraising Chair, had given me a list of the vendors who had contributed to the June conference. It was gratifying to personally thank those who had donated and talk about future efforts. At the January meeting, we will be discussing more on Fundraising and the need for item donations as well as sustainable monetary funding.

On the near horizon is our preparation for the January Business Meeting. At the last meeting, the Board decided to review at the winter meeting our long term goals that were developed 5 years ago. In the next week or so, each team will be sent a "survey" that will look at past goals, accomplishments and solicit new ideas. It's a bit of homework for all to do before the meeting. It is our hope that it will allow the Board to focus on the important issues of the membership and not just on listing them out at the meeting. Also, Dan Land, Secretary/Treasurer, will be presenting a proposal for a scholarship program at the January meeting. Please plan on having a delegate at the meeting as many important subjects will be discussed. The Officers will send out an Agenda before so your teams can give input and be aware of any pending issues.

Mike Vorachek, member at large, continues to keep in touch with the credentialing/typing debate; a dynamic and challenging project that will continue to evolve. Be assured, the Officers will carefully consider the MRA's position and be proactive in this arena.

A thank you to David Kovar for backing up Neil Van Dyke, webmaster, while he was out this summer. Neil has some great stories and photos from his summer as a backcountry ranger in the Adirondacks. Maybe we can get him to put some on the Lister??? The website is undergoing some updates that will include a FEDERAL page and a MEDIA

page that will link to important information regarding our NIMS work and contacts for the press.

At the end of next week, my husband Jeff and I travel to Colorado. Visits with Vail MR and Alpine MR are on the agenda as well as ITRS. The symposium has become one of my favorite ways to meet MRA members, see old friends, discuss issues and enjoy the camaraderie and friendship of those who share our same compassion for those in need.

Safe travels,
Fran Sharp
MRA President

