

PORTAL RESCUE NEWS

P O Box 331, Portal, AZ 85632

February, 1996

Emergency 558 -2222

Non-emergency 520-558-2223

Written by the members of Portal Rescue

Edited by Helen Snyder

ANNUAL MEETING FEB. 22, 1996 - EVERYONE COME !

The annual meeting of Portal Rescue will be held at the Portal Fire House on Feb. 22 at 7 pm.

We will recap the past year, discuss and vote on proposed bylaw changes and elect board members for the coming year. Your presence is welcome!

A MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD

We invite you to read our newsletter outlining our 1995 activities. At the end is a summary of our finances, and you will note that our total liquid assets (that is, our potentially spendable money) have increased to over \$32,000. I'm sure many of you are thinking, "why should I donate money this year when Portal Rescue has \$32,000 in the bank? That should keep an organization that size running for a while!"

Our operating expenses totaled over \$14,000 for the past year. The yearly grant we've received in the past from the Arizona Department of Health Services covers only about a third of these expenses; therefore we depend on donations for the remaining two thirds.

It is sound, conservative fiscal policy to have emergency funds, whether you are a family, a business or a non-profit organization. Portal Rescue's Board of Directors strongly feel that we need a minimum of \$20,000 in reserve. The youngest of the four vehicles in our "fleet" is 14 years old, and one could need a major overhaul or replacement at any time. The

ADHS granting program could end without notice, and we would need emergency funds to keep operating until additional monies could be located.

Unfortunately this year our community lost four active citizens. So many people donated generously in their names that we were able to purchase some much-needed equipment with these funds, which freed up other monies for the day-to-day expenses. Portal Rescue cannot depend on memorial donations to cover operating expenses. We need to have the community donate because Portal Rescue is an important and needed service, available to every one of us.

Please -- consider making a yearly pledge to Portal Rescue. It's tax-deductible and 100% of your contribution stays in this community, working to protect life and property. That's a far better return than from a fire district tax!

May we depend on you? Have a safe and healthy 1996,

The Board of Directors
Portal Rescue, Inc.

NEW OFFICERS IN 1995

The spring of 1995 marked the end of an era for Portal Rescue, when both Bob Morse and Rene Blondeau retired from the board of directors.

These two gave countless hours to build Portal Rescue into a strong organization, with a good base of trained people and equipment, and financially prepared for the future.

A cushion of funds in the bank has

allowed a new team to take over without having to worry immediately about raising enough money to pay the monthly bills.

The wisdom of this fiscally conservative approach was appreciated when for six difficult months we feared that the regular state grants we received in the past would be completely unavailable to us this year. For the happy ending to this story, see the President's report, below.

Devorie Griffiths, our longtime dispatcher, now serves as President. Other board members are Barbara Miller (Vice President) Yvette Reheurek (Treasurer) and Bob Fagan from the community, and Portal Rescue members Jeff Gee (EMS chief), Max Rothpletz (Fire Chief), Dennis McAvoy, Fran Zweifel and Gerry Hernbrode (Secretary).

Board meetings are held at the firehouse on the second Thursday of the month, and are full of lively discussion. They are open to all, as are fire meetings on the third Thursday of the month. - Ed.

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

I am very excited to be a part of the new Board of Directors. We have a great team who work well together this first year, and are enthusiastic about the job they have all volunteered to do. The new EMS chief, Jeff Gee, and Fire Chief Max Rothpletz are great leaders who maintain an excellent rapport with their respective teams as well as with the Board.

The first year has been quite challenging. Our first job was to learn how Portal Rescue operated and not to make too many changes (boy, did we have a lot to learn!) However, change is inevitable and it happens whether you plan for it or not.

Our first major hurdle was encountered when we were told we would not be receiving our usual state grant this year. We discussed other funding options, including the formation of a fire district so that we could receive tax monies, as well as the option of writing for private corporate grants and lobbying the state legislature for continued funding of the rural EMS grants we thought we'd lost.

Our letters to State Representatives

generated quick replies that indeed they had appropriated money specifically for rural EMS, they were surprised to hear that we not receiving our grant and that they would look into the matter.

And indeed, in early October we received word that our grant money and a contract were forthcoming. The Board feels that as long as we continue to receive funding from the state, and local contributions continue at their previously generous level, that it is not necessary to contemplate forming a fire district.

We welcome input from everyone because this is your community organization. The Board meetings are open to anyone wishing to attend and speak. If you have any questions or opinions about Portal Rescue, please speak to one of us.

"Till next time!

Devorie Griffiths,
President

BASIC EMT CLASS BEING TAUGHT IN PORTAL

EMTs Joan White and Debbie Rothpletz are now State-certified instructors and are teaching a class to train new EMTs. It began in October and will run through February.

Guest lecturers have included Douglas Paramedics, the Chief Ranger at Chiricahua National Monument, and some of our local EMTs.

This training is valuable whether or not a student plans to become an EMT. It teaches one to recognize life-threatening medical conditions and what to do about them, information anyone may suddenly have need for at any time, with children, parents, spouse or friends, strangers and even pets.

The class is intense, with lots of hands-on practice. The anatomy lesson included a fresh heart, lungs and brain from a pig, obtained from a local meat-packing house upon written assurance to their meat inspector that the organs would be used for study purposes only, not for sushi, satanic rituals, or transplant practice.

- Ed.

**HAVE YOU CHANGED YOUR SMOKE
ALARM BATTERIES THIS YEAR?**

SEARCH TEAM FORMS

In addition to fire and EMS activities, Portal Rescue is called first when someone in our area is missing. It's been a busy season already; from late 1995 through January we had four callouts. We normally respond within a half hour of being notified that someone is overdue. We locate any available volunteers, whether a member of Portal Rescue or not and search till the Cochise County Sheriff's Department search teams arrive, usually some 2-6 hours after our initial callout

We are now training a core team of searchers so that we may be most effective in our first hours of searching.

Our first training session was held on Friday, Dec. 1. It was conducted by Lt. Larry Dever of the Cochise County Sheriff's Department and included an introduction to search methods and lost-person behavior.

We heard some interesting real-life search stories, including a dramatic account by Portal's Barbara Roth of her 3-day ordeal in the Olympic National Park a few years ago.

Our next training session will cover topographic maps and compass use. Watch for an announcement of the date.

Please join us if you are interested! We especially need people who are familiar with some of the local trails and off-road backcountry, the mines, caves etc. in our area, especially the Cave Creek, Sulfur, Silver Creek, East Turkey Creek and Whitetail drainages.

- Ed.

MASS CASUALTY AND INCIDENT COMMAND TRAINING IN PORTAL

The Department of Public Safety held a training day here for Cochise County rescue personnel on Saturday, June 10, 1995. About 70 people attended or assisted.

The event was organized as a follow-up to the multi-vehicle accident on I-10 in April.

We had classroom instruction and discussion at the fire station, and a practical drill on Jeff and Kim Gee's property just west of the Rothpletz residence. A multi-vehicle accident was staged with volunteer

"patients" made up to look injured. We handled the event as though it were real, including a landing by the DPS helicopter. We critiqued ourselves afterward and are now better prepared to deal with large-scale emergencies.

- Ed.

THE TRAINING NEVER STOPS

Two new firefighters joined the team in 1995: Sharman Wisdom and Nancy McAvoy completed the State Land Department's Wildlife Firefighting course and were voted in as active members of Portal Rescue.

Arizona EMTs must take a 120-hour instruction course in order to become certified. To retain certification, an EMT must continue to study and practice. Much of our continuing education (ce) is classroom-based and we often have excellent instructors from outside Portal Rescue, such as Paramedic Frank Lara from Douglas Fire Department and Bonnie Roach and Dr. Mickey Miller from Tucson Medical Center.

EMTs recertifying in 1995 met under the tutelage of Joan White weekly between March and May to study for the recertification exam in July; all passed.

On May 16, 1995 we participated in a different sort of training activity, when 5 EMTs and 2 firefighters went to Animas for a mock graduation-night car accident in the High School parking lot. Two cars with 7 teens had "crashed" head-on. It was treated as though real and a page went out over Hidalgo Sheriff's radio for help, with the dispatcher adding that it was a mock accident in case any parents were listening on scanners. With all of Animas High's students looking on, we and other local EMTs rolled in with lights and sirens and went to work extricating and treating the "victims"

The exercise was intended to make the students consider the consequences of drinking and driving. The "patients" were moulaged, or dramatically made up to look injured - fake broken bones sticking out and fake blood everywhere. The crowd went quiet as two of the pale, limp young actors were put into body bags which were then zipped up and piled to one side (the bags

were then secretly unzipped enough to allow the undead to breathe).

After a half an hour of noisy extrication and medical treatment, a Hidalgo Sheriff's Deputy wrapped up the event by recounting to the students what the drunken student "driver" faced - the immediate criminal charges that would be placed against him, and how the crash would affect his wallet, his life, and his employability forever. -Ed.

PORTAL RESCUE BOOSTER FUND

Portal Rescue receives generous support from residents and neighbors every year. Most of this money goes into our General Fund, for our basic operating needs - medical, rescue and firefighting equipment; to, replenish medical supplies used on calls for residents (whom we do not charge): vehicle and malpractice insurance, and other necessities of doing business.

Max Rothpletz and Jeff Gee started a new fund for some of the "extras" for EMTs and firefighters i.e. uniforms, arm patches, and hats. Our limited general fund doesn't allow for uniforms, but they are important when on a multi-agency call, so that we can be easily identified as rescuers by other responders, law enforcement officers, etc.

Looking professional is also good for morale. To launch us, Jeff Gee's mother Janet Gee donated a dozen printed t-shirts she won in a radio-contest. She gave us the dark blue shirts with a Maltese cross and "Portal Rescue". Thanks, Janet!

Barney Tomberlin and Fran Zweifel worked on designing and ordering some beautiful embroidered shoulder patches for Portal Rescue. We now have these emblems for our uniforms.

We have been raising dollars ourselves for this booster fund from both inside and out of the community. A spare-change donation can at the Portal Store produced about a dollar a day all summer. The Portal Store donates their collected aluminum cans for recycling, and cans are collected at the Post Office. Several individuals have made cash donations, and over \$800 has been raised to date -Ed.

THE AMBULANCE ANIMALS

Heather Rothpletz decided at age 13 that she had outgrown some of the stuffed animals she has collected forever, and she donated them to Portal Rescue. Why, you ask, would we want these? Well, we carry a few small fuzzy toys in the rescue vehicle to give to injured kids we treat. It seems to make things less scary for our littlest patients if they have a small stuffed friend to hug. -Ed.

NEW WATER TENDER

There's a new truck in town: San Simon has transferred to us a former military water tender, a 1,000 gallon firefighting water truck painted in camo. It looks like it something Mel Gibson would drive through the post-atomic-apocalypse Australian outback with a spike-haired outlaw chained to the hood.

But appearances aren't everything. It really is a sweet and obedient vehicle (is that why they call it a tender?) and its presence in our "fire fleet" means additional opportunity for Portal Rescue to battle blazes near home and to earn income on fires when we are summoned elsewhere. -Ed.

INTERSTATE 10 DUST STORM CRASH

Portal Rescue was one of half a dozen agencies that were summoned on a Sunday afternoon in April 1995 to respond to a multi-casualty incident on I-10 at milepost 373 between San Simon and Bowie. April 9 would be a day unlike any we had ever experienced.

The day had been very windy, and at a little after 2 pm a dense dust cloud obscured both lanes. Over 30 vehicles quickly piled up in 5 separate accidents in both lanes spread over a third of a mile.

As eight Portal EMTs rolled toward the scene, we talked about what we might find, and wrote out a list of our equipment and

personnel to hand to the Incident Commander. The calm preparations helped steady us for we knew would be an experience unlike any we'd had as EMTs with Portal Rescue.

And it was: the initial impression was one of carnage. Great random forces of destruction had split open tractor trailer trucks and smashed passenger cars into unrecognizable shapes. 34 vehicles were involved. One of the 18-wheelers had spilled slabs of beef ribs on the highway; another had strewn children's toys everywhere.

As our Portal vehicles crept toward the cluster of rescue trucks and flashing lights at the command center, we could see wind whipped, uniformed rescuers moving between the wreckage and the ambulances. The blowing dust clumped their hair and turned rescuer's weary faces into red-eyed, dirt-colored masks.

The most seriously injured patients had already been airlifted to hospitals by the time we arrived, but there was plenty left for us to do. We worked in three teams, removing people from cars, spineboarding them and loading them into ambulances for transport. The wind, the dust and the blood underfoot mixed with slippery, potentially flammable diesel fuel and hydraulic fluid made a difficult job harder.

We treated and comforted many people during the time we were on scene that afternoon. Many of our patients seemed to be in shock as much from what they'd seen as they were from their own injuries.

8 people died at the scene, among them a child. 2 more children died the next day. A total of 26 were injured. Some had undoubtedly been saved by seat belts. Some of the dead undoubtedly would have perished despite airbags and seat belts.

We had long trained to be able to help in an incident of this magnitude, and while nothing can ever prepare one for such an event, our training had paid off. We had anticipated our equipment needs well, and the training we did together had given us the trust and mutual support system to deal with the challenges of the day.

If anything good can be said to have come of this terrible day, it is that we emerged a stronger team, knowing now that

we were capable of handling what we'd only imagined we could before. - Ed.

WHY ARE YOU *DOING* THIS?

Portal Rescue members on occasion get asked this question; usually by a family member after a "bad call". We asked some members of Portal Rescue for the answer to the question "Why did you become an emergency medical technician? What are the rewards?"

DELANE BLONDEAU : "As a child, I knew I could never be a nurse. But when we came to Portal and it was 60 miles to the nearest doctor, I was like everyone else who moves here: what will we do in a medical emergency? Locally it was said,

" You just toss them in the back of the pick-up and take them in. "

"Joe Schatz investigated some alternatives. He came up with a federally funded program that paid for our tuition and book if we would serve our community as an Emergency Medical Technician. There was the answer to our problem: become a part of the solution!

"Now, having been an EMT for almost 15 years, I've seen the worth of Portal Rescue. I'm totally impressed with the dedication of our group and the value we are to our community. I'll go any time to anyone's aid in an emergency, but I still don't want to be a nurse.... "

RENE BLONDEAU : "After nearly 15 years of answering emergency calls, you might think it has become routine and "part of the day's work". Yet the memories -- and emotions -- of some calls are still just as vivid as the day they happened.

"Some were sad: the helpless feeling while looking down at the face of a once talkative neighbor who could now only just stare and no longer communicate, or the instant hard lump in my stomach upon learning that a patient we had treated that day had died in the hospital.

"Some memories are of difficult but affirming moments, like offering a prayer over a deceased Catholic patient, or the sadness of conducting a friend's funeral. Some memories are good, like seeing the relief on the face of a spouse when we finally arrived on the scene.

"Some memories are funny, like realizing, while carrying a patient across Cave Creek on a backboard, that my brand-new boots were filling with water, or of using a fancy \$400 suction

device (normally used to clear patients' mouths) to suck a pop-bead out of a child's nose. But clearly the brightest and best is the good feeling that comes from being ready and able to help friends and neighbors".

HELEN SNYDER : "For me the reward of being an EMT comes when you open the Douglas paper to find a picture and story about a bright teenager accepting a school award, when earlier in the year you'd treated the barely-conscious youngster for a skull fracture, and wondered whether your patient would be alive that night as the helicopter lifted off."

1995 FIRE ACTIVITY SUMMARY

The fire division has some good news and some bad news to report. The good news is -- we did not have any fires in 1995! So nothing was destroyed, no property ruined and none of our firemen was injured.

The bad news is -- we didn't have any fires in 1995! So we did not have any income from the State Land Department or the Forest Service, both of whom pay for our services when they use them. This quiet season was a sharp contrast to 1994, in which the Rattlesnake Fire and several others produced some welcome income.

1996 promises to relieve the boredom. We have already responded to two fires, both in the open mesquite grassland southeast of Portal. With the almost-total lack of rain over this winter, 1996 may well be a hot and busy fire season.

We had some good training sessions, including an Emergency Vehicle Operator's Class taught by Animas Fire Department as a donation in memory of Custie Mauzy. It turned out to be a very thought-provoking afternoon as we worked through imaginary scenarios which required us to make decisions involving the handling of large emergency vehicles in fast-changing traffic settings -- Max Rothpletz, Fire Chief

HALOGEN BULB ALERT!

Did you know that those classy halogen bulbs in your track lighting system get far hotter than the usual incandescent bulbs? How hot, you ask? About 1,200 ° F.!

A recent rash of fires in Phoenix has been due to these bulbs being used too close to flammable surfaces. 12 inches is the recommended minimum distance between any such bulb and a flammable surface.

Halogen bulb packaging warns against hot fragments of glass in case of breakage. This is an additional risk. Ed.

1995 MEDICAL CALL SUMMARY

We responded to 38 medical calls between Feb. 1, 1995 and Jan 31, 1996, involving a total of 44 patients. 60% were males. Half were local folks or their visiting family members. Four patients were flown out by helicopter last year, 17 were transported by Douglas Ambulance, 3 by Hidalgo Ambulance and the rest were transported by other means.

We treated thirty-two using basic life support. The remaining 11 needed advanced life support. We worked 9 separate incidents involving one or more motor vehicles, of which 6 were rollovers, and 1 was a case of a small child falling from a truck.

We responded to two horseback accidents and both victims were among those flown out by helicopter - Ed.

PATIENT CONFIDENTIALITY

When you see the orange and white Portal Rescue vehicle running "Code 3" (red lights and siren), or you hear the medical evacuation helicopter land, your first thought in a community this size is "who's in trouble?"

EMTs must protect the privacy of patients. If you ask one of us about a call and we give a vague answer, that's why.

We have revised our dispatch policy so that when we page the EMTs over the radio, the identity of the patient or family, and exact location of the call is not revealed to the considerable number of people operating a scanner. Instead, we tell the EMTs in person at the station where they are headed and for whom they will be caring.

Nor does our radio traffic during the call reveal anything more than anonymous medical information, plus our own general location information when en route - Ed.

1995 BUDGET REPORT, PORTAL RESCUE

BUDGET ACTIVITY IN 1995

1995 INCOME

ADHS Provider Grant	5,837.00
Payment for services - EMS	1,491.00
Payment for services - Fire	609.27
General and memorial donations	6,615.00
Search & Rescue donation	100.00
Income from EMT class tuition	1,665.00
Interest	604.62
Booster Fund	889.65
Other (refunds, etc.)	344.80
TOTAL	18,156.34

1995 EXPENSES

Portal Rescue General Fund - repairs to bldg & eqpt	512.90
Workman's Compensation	288.42
EMT class production	1,522.72
EMS: Supplies	1,053.16
Capital equipment	913.38
Fire: Supplies	25
Capital equipment	837.27
Radio repairs & maintenance	831.99
Vehicles: Maintenance and repair	696.56
Operation - gas & oil	475.75
Licencing	83.70
Insurance	4,033.00
Building utilities	330.35
Office expenses & phone	713.70
Training & Education	
In-house training and continuing education (General Fund)	492.31
EMT Instructors & conference fees (Valley Telephone Grant)	1,000.00
Miscellaneous	110.00
Booster Fund (uniforms & Portal Rescue patches)	542.93
TOTAL	14,463.14

1995 INCOME MINUS EXPENSES **3,693.20**

SUMMARY

ASSETS ON HAND, 1/31/96

Certificates of Deposit	25,577.39
Checking account	7,134.58
TOTAL ASSETS	32,711.97

LIABILITIES

Balance due on water tender, due over the next 4 yr	2,000.00
TOTAL LIABILITIES	2,000.00

OVERALL TOTAL **30,711.97**

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