

PORTAL RESCUE NEWS

P O Box 331, Portal, AZ 85632
February, 1997

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PLEASE COME TO THE ANNUAL MEETING FEB. 13 AT 7 PM !

Portal Rescue's annual meeting will be held Thursday, February 13 at 7:00 pm in the fire house in Portal. If the weather is cold we'll move to the library. Come hear about the year past and plans for the future and help elect community board members to serve in 1997-98. Treats will be served.

Some really nice door prizes have been donated and will be given away:

- Dinner for 2 at the Portal Store
- Two haircuts by Sandee Eves, of Changes A Salon, in Rodeo
- Breakfast at the Rodeo Store
- Honey (R&B Lumber)
- Two pizzas from Rodeo Tavern
- Venom extractor (Hatari Invertebrates)
- Two bottles of herb vinegar (Gourmet Desert Creations)
- Horned Lizard T-shirt (SWRS)
- T- shirt and tank top (Captive Bred Wildlife Foundation)

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

BY DEVORIE GRIFFITHS

Why do they do it, what's in it for them?

I've asked myself these questions numerous times over the past two years, as I have served our members. All of our volunteers have lives and jobs they put on hold whenever called upon for help. Some even lose their hourly wages when they answer a page. And as I've learned, the time spent on an EMT call or fire is only a fraction of the time they volunteer to our organization.

State rules and regulations are ever-changing, requiring continual training, constant upgrading of skills and additional

paperwork. Members are required to attend monthly meetings and trainings, conduct vehicle inspections and service equipment. Keeping four aging emergency vehicles running and in good repair is no small task. In addition to the time they give, volunteers' personal safety, health and liability all go on the line every time they answer a page.

All this for no personal monetary gain. So why do they do it? I think it's because they really want to help and they know they are needed in an emergency. And maybe because it makes them feel they are a better person for it.

What do they get out of it? A lot!

- Personal satisfaction of a job well done.
- The knowledge that the skills they have may save someone's life, their home, or just give them some peace of mind.
- The pride in knowing they have done their very best in a difficult situation.
- The knowledge that they have made a difference in someone's life.
- The feelings of camaraderie that have developed between members as a result of working as a team.

I am extremely proud to be a part of this team. Our EMTs, firefighters, officers, captains and Board Members are a very dedicated group of individuals who have come together for the good of their community and neighbors.

I'd like to thank the community for your support and ask for the continued support of your volunteers who are here to serve you. They need not only your financial support but your caring and trust and expressions of gratitude as well.

One EMT recently said that the gratitude shown by patients and their families and friends is the best reward he could ask

for. Let us, as a community, continue to recognize the efforts these special people provide. Recognition of a job well done is a tremendous motivating factor.

Fran Zweifel, EMS chief, and Max Rothpletz, Fire Chief have done an incredible job with their departments. They are great leaders. Special thanks to my fellow Board Members Yvette, Barbara, Richard, Fran, Max, Debbie, Helen and Gerry - it's been a pleasure (for the most part!) to work with you. Thanks for all your dedication.

I look forward to 1997!

BUILDING EXPANSION

BY GERRY HERNBRODE

Thanks to the extreme generosity of Mary Willy's donation of additional land to Portal Rescue, we'll be able to add bathrooms to the Fire Station. The building expansion will occur in two phases. At the January 13th board meeting the motion passed that "the first phase of the building project including a septic system, full 40 by 24 foot slab, plumbing and enclosed bathroom will proceed at the approximate cost of \$8,000 -- over half of which has been donated to date. The remaining funds will be taken from savings and future donations." The goal is to have Phase I finished by the end of 1997.

Phase I, "the enclosed bathroom" is needed because of the number of meetings held in the fire station. For example, each month there is an EMS training attended by 15 EMTs that lasts from three to six hours. September's two-day training lasted for sixteen hours. Add to this the monthly Fire meetings with 16 fire fighters, and monthly Board meetings with 9 members. There's Kolbe's meeting and his 50 folk. Then, throw in thirty or so folks from the Cochise County Emergency Medical Service/Fire Association who've taken to meeting in Portal at least once a year. Not to mention the Wellness Wagon and, now the soup kitchen. Truth is, the bushes can only take so much, we really need enclosed bathrooms.

It's true, in the interests of delicacy the store never complains...has actually invited these mobs to use the store facility. They're being good sports, but we notice

their customers step aside as the Fire Station mobs descend from the mountain. It just isn't right.

Another thought: EMTs coming back from calls should have a place to wash up. If they trail blood or other possibly contaminated matter into their homes, it's enough to make their families nervous.

The bathrooms will require a cement foundation, a septic system and plumbing. The Board decided it would be less expensive in the long run to plan for future expansion now and pour a 24 foot wide slab the full length of the east end of the building. Looking down the line a few years, as funds become available, Phase II consists of adding a kitchen and a classroom/meeting room.

It would be handy; Debbie and Joan have made us a certified training facility to train our own homegrown EMTs. New regs require more "hands on" training that needs to be done in the station with the equipment, not in the library where we used to do it.

With the Portal crowd outgrowing the library, it would also be handy to have a meeting room that could be used occasionally by the general public....and Kolbe.

But first...the enclosed bathroom. We'll be discussing these plans at our annual meeting on February 13th. Join us.

NOTES FROM THE TREASURER

BY YVETTEREHUREK

Operating expenses for Portal Rescue from February 1, 1996 to January 15, 1997 totaled over \$19,000. Our grant money from 95-96 covered \$5,000 of these expenses, which included a new base station radio for \$1,000 and \$3,800 toward vehicle repairs, insurance and maintenance.

Where did the funds come from to cover the rest? We received donations to the general fund totaling \$2,906, of which \$780 was from memorials. We received an additional \$1500 in pledges for the Wilderness EMT training that three of our EMTs are going to be taking in 1997. More came from aluminum can recycling. Some towns have a bag lady; Portal has a can lady - Helen Snyder has stomped and schlepped into Douglas

about 60,000 cans this year, returning with \$800 for the till.

This still didn't cover our '96 expenses. We were saved this year by our financial knights in smoking armor, the FIRE DEPARTMENT!! Their hard work fighting fires brought us to the top by producing \$13,775 in income. But we can't count on this source every year; the 1995 fire income was only \$600.

What's the answer for future funding? We ask all of you to make a yearly pledge to Portal Rescue.

For this coming year, our grant monies have been cut to \$3,050, which will cover only about three fourths of our annual insurance bill. The Department of Health Services and the State Land Department are continually increasing the amount of training that our EMTs and firefighters are required to take, which means training and travel costs go steadily up just to stay certified. Our vehicles are getting older and not better. Only because of the efforts of some very dedicated volunteers are the vehicles able to start on command and run safely to calls.

Show your support to all of our volunteer EMTs and firefighters by making a pledge to Portal Rescue and renewing it every year. You never know when the next call for help to 558-2222 will be for you. We want to be there when that call comes.

A detailed financial report will be available at the annual meeting.

A MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF

BY MAX ROTHPLETZ

Congratulations to all the firefighters for a safe and productive year. Thank you all for volunteering. All the help and support you have given me is greatly appreciated!

Congratulations to all residents in our response area for making 1996 such a safe fire season. State-wide closures and fire restrictions helped raise general awareness of the need for great care in the extra-dry spring and early summer months.

We responded to several major fires during the year; the Clark Peak Fire on Mt.

Graham, the Sunny Fire in Cave Creek Canyon above Sunny Flats, and a grass and haybarn fire on the IV Bar Ranch were the big ones. We also responded to several smaller roadside/lightning fires, and a dump fire.

Our trainings included an interesting weather class, in which we learned how suddenly weather can change in fire season.

PORTAL FIREFIGHTERS GET SMOKY

The fire that burned on the Pinalenos this year in May was officially called the Clark Peak fire. It started in late April near Riggs Lake and burned for over a month.

It quickly became one of the region's major blazes and the Forest Service turned over the job of managing it to one of their specialized teams. This was in part because of the size and the time of year (no precipitation in sight till July, usually) and the fact that it involved a political tinderbox too - the area around the Mt. Graham telescope complex.

The Type I Team as it was called was a sort of portable beauracacy-in-a-box. Its people and components arrived by truck, air and overnight UPS in many labeled crates. In a day a mini-civilization was created, complete with chiefs, charts, chefs and chow. They had everything necessary to plan, communicate, and execute the job. Safety was a reassuringly high-profile priority.

Our little red engine huffed and puffed all the way up the Pinalenos, where it stayed for the better part of a week. We had a crew of three with it at all times, rotating people in and out as they became available. A fire camp at Columbine was home; we ate there, were briefed there daily and slept in tents nearby. We didn't shower there, and we didn't shower anywhere else... good thing it was cool.

We were assigned to pump water to hand crews on the slopes below the road, and to fill the portable backpack pumps of other firefighters. We filled our truck whenever possible by pirating water from one of the larger water tenders cruising by, or by drafting from Riggs Lake.

Going to the lake meant getting to watch the helicopters filling buckets to be towed off and dumped over burning snags. One chopper filled itself by lowering a huge snorkeltube and hovering while it sucked up a couple thousand gallons in minutes.

Portal Rescue was delighted to be called on for help, because it was great experience for us, and because the income from such a prolonged effort can be considerable; firefighting earned us 2/3 of our annual budget this year!

FIRE CLASS IN MARCH

A fire class will be taught here in Portal that will certify you to be a wildland firefighter. It is a 32-hour class, lasting 4 days. Take it to learn what to do when fire comes roaring up the hillside near you!

Debbie Rothpletz (558-2417) is in charge of sign-up. The dates of the class are March 8 and 9th, then 22-23rd. It costs \$20; if you join Portal Rescue, you get a refund.

NEW EMTS, NEW CLASS

This spring, Debbie Rothpletz and Joan White finished teaching the first-ever Portal Rescue-taught EMT class in Portal. Their students did their clinicals and required testing and now three new state-certified EMTs have been voted in as members of Portal Rescue. They are Kate Arambula of Rodeo, Max Rothpletz Jr. of Portal, and Chris Lentz of San Simon. Congratulations to these three; they worked hard, and their skills have already been used on many medical calls this year.

A second class is scheduled to begin in the fall of 1997. Watch your local bulletin boards for announcements.

In addition, Joan and Debbie have produced regular Continuing Education sessions for Portal EMTs and special training events, like our day-long defibrillator class and the BTLS class, below.

We get letters . . . *"Thank you for helping me celebrate another birthday last week"*

NEXT-TO-THE OLDEST PROFESSION?

BY MAX ROTHPLETZ

Next year will be the 350th anniversary of volunteer fire services. Thomas Jefferson, Paul Revere, and George Washington were all volunteer fire fighters. Benjamin Franklin is considered to be the Father of Volunteer Firefighting in the U.S. He organized the first volunteer fire company. The founding fathers must have had more on their minds than just politics.

BTLS CLASS

A Basic Trauma Life Support class teaching team came to Portal in September. This class is an intense, 2-day practical exercise in which Portal EMTs were presented with many realistic scenarios involving patients with very lifelike moulage (fake injury makeup).

Pat Willy's gunshot wound to the head and Dick Zweifel's bar-fight injuries looked right out of Chicago Hope. We are grateful to the team who brought their teaching talents to Portal for this, to the Portal Store for allowing us to take over six of their rooms for the scenarios, and to the actors-victims who allowed us to prod and tickle them in the name of medical education.

THE DEFIBRILLATOR

Contrary to rumor, Portal Rescue is not going to start running lie detector tests on patients. That big red briefcase-sized thing with the wires and stick-on chest pads is a semi-automatic defibrillator.

This equipment can read the rhythm of a heart in trouble, determine whether a shock is advised that may restore a normal heartbeat, then produce that shock. Its use required a day of training and frequent practices, plus daily checks of the equipment.

THE GPS UNIT

For the last few years when we called in a medical helicopter, the incoming pilot would ask "What's your GPS?". We now have the means to answer: A Garmin 38 GPS (Global Positioning System) unit is now in the rescue vehicle.

This wallet-sized electronic wonder wakes at the touch of a button, and listens for signals from a subset of 24 possible satellites orbiting overhead. It then calculates its own position by latitude, longitude and altitude and presents the results in a few minutes on its modest little screen. It is accurate to within several dozen yards.

BIG BAD BUS WRECK ON I-10

BY FRANCES ZWEIFEL

Jolted awake - the EMT radio! What time is it? Just before midnight, Nov. 23. Another big accident on I-10, this one involving a bus and a semi. Oh Lord.

Joan White has been routed out of bed too: I'll meet her at her gate in minutes. Soon we are hurtling through dark desert down the road to San Simon, thinking "Gotta cool it! We don't have time for two accidents tonight!" as we fly across an unseen dip and slow down a bit. Flashing lights ahead of us, also moving fast: must be Portal Rescue's Unit 3 (our "ambulance"). And in the rear view mirror, more flashing lights: the fire truck, called out to all vehicle accidents.

The wreck is at the Port of Entry, near the office. Later we learned what had happened: a semi had missed the turn into the truck inspection lane and a bus carrying 44 people had plowed into its left rear corner. Twenty-seven people had been injured. By the time we arrived, almost two hours after the accident, the most critical patients had gone out by helicopter or ambulance, but there are many more to treat. Russ Griffiths in Unit 3 says "You two go to the office - they're 16 patients in there".

Portal EMTs Gerry, Jeff, Chris, Max and Max Jr. are inside, with EMTs from Bowie. The 16 passengers appear calm, sitting in chairs or lying on the floor and just waiting their turn for help.

The job of caring for them will be difficult: most do not speak English. One by one, we assess the injuries and package people for transport: we apply cervical collars and KEDs (Kendrick Extrication Device, a short spine splint applied to a seated patient) and gently place each on a spineboard.

All these precautions are to prevent further injury, including paralysis, to our patients. We give oxygen; an apparent broken arm is splinted in a rolled-up magazine, as all available splints are already on their way to the hospital.

Gerry struggles to complete paperwork quickly for each, listing our findings, treatments and the status of each patient so that a doctor can later detect a deterioration should it occur. Some data is simply written on tape affixed to the patient.

Meanwhile, Debbie and Dennis have crawled through a side window of the bus, as the door and front end were crushed against the semi. There are 6 passengers still in the back; two must be strapped to spineboards and with the help of many hands are lifted through the window and outside. Ambulances leave with patients, and more return. Debbie leaves in the Bowie ambulance with a critical patient, also acting as preceptor to a paramedic-in-training.

Finally all the patients are out of the office and on their way to Willcox. I take a last look around: not much disarray, considering what just took place. I toss a couple of discarded exam gloves in the trash, and leave.

Joan and I drive home quietly. It takes a while for the adrenalin to work its way out of the system: we are tired, but it will be several hours before we get to sleep. Meanwhile, our EMTs who took patients to Willcox must wait for their patients to be admitted. Equipment has a way of vanishing in a mass casualty like this; Gerry retrieves our KED, but a spineboard is gone for good.

At dawn the last EMTs arrive back at the station and set to work cleaning up Unit 3. No matter the hour, it must always be ready to roll.

ROPE RESCUE IN SOUTH FORK

About noon on March 31, 1996 we were called to come help a "girl on a rock who had climbed up and couldn't get down". When we arrived, it was immediately apparent that this was no frightened child atop a boulder. An athletic young college student was stranded high on a cliff, having free-

climbed (i.e. without rock-climbing equipment) about 80 feet up the canyon wall next to the Skull Eyes cave in South fork. She had found handholds here and there up the sloped face till she suddenly came to a vertical stretch and was unable to back down.

She had been there since about 1000 am and was becoming uncomfortable because she could not move or let go of the cliff. She wore shorts and a T-shirt; luckily the day was not particularly cool or windy.

It was immediately apparent that this was to be a technical rescue, i.e. one needing full rock-climbing gear and skills. A fall for this girl would mean certain death, and rescuers trying to bring her to safety would be in danger themselves. We put out a call to the Cochise County Sheriff's Office for a rescue team and backup support.

Jeff Gee and Max Rothpletz handled the first part of the technical rescue. Jeff started up the cliff along the route the victim had taken, putting in anchors and a fixed rope for the rest of the rescue. He lacked enough equipment to cross the final 20' to where the young woman was clinging to the rock, so he returned to the ground.

Meanwhile, other rescuers began arriving: Rob Danno, Chief Ranger from the Chiricahua National Monument and an expert climber and experienced rescuer himself, helped us make critical decisions during the rescue.

Three hours after it began, the CCSO team arrived, including a large contingent of volunteers from Sierra Vista, as did the DPS helicopter. It landed in Portal and ferried 4 climbers, including Jeff, to the top of the cliff and dropped them on a point of rock the size of a car hood. They worked their way through the ragged brush and rock to a point above the victim and began the lengthy job of setting up ropes and anchors so that Jeff could descend to the young woman. Safety was a major factor, as it would be important not to knock rocks down onto her unprotected head.

Alex Stone of the Forst Service had climbed the canyon wall to a point opposite the woman and talked with her during the

rescue, reassuring her and describing what was going on.

Despite Alex's efforts, by 4 pm the mental status of the victim, which had been good early on, began to deteriorate: she was in the shadows now and cold, and complained of her discomfort. She began to cry, saying she was going to jump because no one was coming to get her. It was quickly becoming an urgent situation.

Jeff carefully descended on a rope about 200 feet to the young woman, who by now had been reached by CCSO climbers from below and was helmeted and secured in a seat harness. The last rays of sun bronzed the scene as Jeff and the victim dropped down the cliff face and landed at the base of the cliff at 6:30 pm. The young woman was unhurt and extremely grateful to us for saving her life.

Skull Eyes seemed to brood over the action all day, and an additional morbid touch was provided by a flock of about 20 turkey vultures. They arrived in the area at 3 pm on and circled with great interest over the rescue taking place, as it happened, under their night roost.

The last rescuer left the area at 11 pm. We received help from many local folks, including the Southwest Research Station (general ground-pounder sherpa duty) the Forest Service (traffic control, communications and helping with the actual rescue) and the Portal Store (communications, tire repairs, food preparation) as well as many individuals.

SOUP KITCHEN TO THE RESCUE ! WHERE TO EAT OUT DURING PORTAL STORE CLOSING, FEB 18, 19 and 20

The annual 3-day shutdown for the cleaning of the Portal Store usually leaves us with no place to eat in town, and in past years by the second day of the closure, the gaunt, starving residents coming in for their mail at noon severely missed the usual comforting cooking smells downwind of Portal.

This year will be different. Portal Rescue will host a 3-day soup kitchen at the

Fire Station. For a \$5 donation, you will be served your choice of several great homemade soups, stew or chili; fresh-baked bread; and your choice of a dessert, served from 11 am to 1 pm. Pecan pie is rumored to be among the offerings.

Season tickets (for all 3 days) can be had for a \$12.50 donation. Barbara Miller (558-2414) and Jan Gee (558-2430) are in charge of operations; contact them to volunteer your homemade goodies, crockpots, extension cords or labor for this fun event. All proceeds from this event will go to the building fund.

THOUGHTS FROM AN EMT

[Each year we like to publish some of the personal stories of our EMTs. Russ Griffiths gave us the following]

The job of being an EMT is a real adrenaline rush. I admit -- I'm an adrenaline junkie! The feelings you experience during and after a call range from very high "highs" (joy, happiness, pride) to very low "lows" (grief, disbelief, sadness) when even after all I've done to help, it just wasn't enough.

Images remain. Some I can never erase:

- The face of the 5-year-old boy shot in the head, on purpose, by his father. He had been carried to my house to be saved, and I couldn't do it.
- The image of my own 5-year-old boy, of the same name as the dead child, watching me work on the boy and wondering what I was doing to him, and my knowing I would have to explain.
- The face of the dead man who'd shot this boy, his own son - how could he?
- The images from the dust-storm pileup on I-10 - the sight of sides of beef scattered over the highway, me fearing what they could be then realizing what they really were - beef - from the overturned truck in the road.
- As we approach this accident, seeing the bloody faces of people coming to tell us to go on, there were people worse off ahead.
- The image of bodies being pulled from a

wrecked car and stacked under a semi trailer in a temporary morgue.

- The sight of red stuff underfoot: is it blood or transmission fluid? Can't tell.
- The memory of interrupting two drunks' party while trying to save the woman who had collapsed in their bathroom. "What do you mean, telling us to stop smoking so you can use oxygen?"
- Living in fear for six months while waiting for results of my HIV tests, because that woman I performed CPR on was positive for HIV and hepatitis.
- Seeing the man we saved from from death from anaphylactic shock; he smiles when he brings me homemade tamales and chorizo.
- Meeting the woman we picked up off the road after she crawled out of her rolled vehicle. She spots me at a gas station in Douglas and gives me a hug and says thanks with tears in her eyes.
- Seeing our neighbor in great pain being carried from the mountains after an all-night rescue with the help of many.
- Seeing the face of one of our own who beat the odds and survived his heart attack.
- Seeing the relief in the face of the girl who was plucked off the cliff, a stranded climber who had just faced sure death if she'd fallen.

The images are ingrained. I try not to dwell but sometimes they come out. They are part of me now. The good and the bad - it's all part of the job.

EMS CALL SUMMARY FOR 1996

Portal Rescue responded to 27 calls for medical assistance and treated 32 patients for problems almost equally divided between medical and trauma. Half required ALS (advanced life support). 5 were transported by helicopter, 17 went by ambulance to a hospital, and the rest went by personal vehicle or refused transport.

We get letters . . . "*The only thing left burned on me now is the memory of your kindness to me and my kids*"

PLEASE USE THIS FORM TO SEND US A PLEDGE FOR 1997

Please accept my donation of \$ _____, and keep up the good work.

Name _____

Address _____

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