



CROSS TRAXX

Fall/Winter 2001

The Voice of SAR Alberta

Alberta, Canada

President's Message Brad Marshall, President SAR Alberta

Back a couple of years ago our national search and rescue association, SARVAC, envisioned that SAR workers in Canada would increasingly be called upon to respond in a capacity that fell outside of the traditional search and rescue/recovery role. More than just light urban SAR, this broad role encompassed numerous activities that municipalities and fellow emergency services simply did not have the capacity to effectively handle, especially in the remote and rural areas of our country. After much consideration, the term they identified that best embodied the scope of this role was Civil Emergency Response.

On March 19th, 1999, the SAR Alberta Board undertook a strategic planning process and created the following vision statement for the organization:

An effective and efficient organization that proudly supports the Search And Rescue civil emergency response community.

Back at that time, not only did the Board agree with the SARVAC vision of the future for SAR workers, but felt it was so important that term "civil emergency response" was incorporated right within both the vi-

sion and mission statements of SAR Alberta, which are still current today. However there were entities within our province that proclaimed that SAR Alberta had "overstepped" its boundaries and was unrealistic in estimating the importance of SAR workers' potential response to large-scale emergencies. With quiet confidence, we look back to a time when we were regularly told by tasking agencies that "civilians can't be SAR Managers cause its far too important and technical a role for any volunteer to grasp," and knew that once again time would prove the righteousness of our position and direction. As fate would have it, we didn't have to wait very long for on one warm July day sixteen months later, our decision was confirmed in a strong and everlasting way.

During the first four days of the Pine Lake Tornado, SAR contributed over 400 volunteers who served in excess of 7000 hours. Furthermore, while so many different agencies and particular individuals were stepping over each other to be identified in the media, SAR workers quietly went about the business of getting the job done.

Even though incident politics hindered SAR receiving its appropriate share of media attention at Pine Lake, the Government of Alberta did not miss SAR's considerable collective contribution, and validated all your hard work with a \$150,000 grant through the Disaster Services Branch of Alberta Municipal Affairs. Of interest relating to this is the importance SAR Alberta placed on the need to develop the civil emergency response ca-

pability of our SAR workers last fall, and we ensured that \$5000 of the grant money was directed towards developing a Civil Emergency Response course for primarily you, the SAR worker.

This past September 11th, the potential for large-scale incidents to occur requiring SAR to significantly respond, took on a new meaning and sense of importance. As fate would have it, at the time I was attending the 10th Annual SARSCENE Conference. Due to the tragic events and closure of North American airspace, a considerable number of conference attendees, presenters and exhibitors were stranded in airports throughout Canada. With great resolve in the face of adversity, Whitehorse Search and Rescue was determined to continue with the Conference, and I must say, it was one of the best SAR conferences I had ever had the opportunity to attend.

Of particular note during the Conference were three hi-lights I'd like to share with you. First, the winners of the National

SAR Competition was our very own Foothills SAR Team. Congratulations to them for proving once again that you do not have to be a paid government employee to attain the highest levels of professional excellence in SAR response. Secondly is the considerable interest from throughout Canada regarding SAR Alberta's creation, "SAR Day in May". Our made in Alberta creation is picking up interest across Canada, on the same day, and we'll will be working with SARVAC and our other provincial counterparts to encourage this initiative to be a national declaration.

Lastly was discussions in some of the workshops regarding how SAR is best going to react to the recent events in the world. Through these national level discussions, it came out that SAR Alberta had not only considered this aspect prior to September 11th, but we were acknowledge by our peers for already developing civil emergency response training to address it. One of SAR Alberta's larger challenges is to shift from being reactive to proactive. I take pride in all these great examples of how we are doing just that, enabled by SAR workers at national, provincial and local levels collectively pulling together in support of a shared vision.

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Foothills SAR Team
L to R: Lee Schneider, Sharon Shier, Laura Morrison & Paul Krich

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SAR McWhirter / Sleno. . . . Bryan Sundberg

On Sept. 24, 2001 at approximately 18:00 hrs, the Crowsnest Pass RCMP detachment contacted a search manager with Alberta Community Development, Parks and Protected Areas Division regarding a report of 2 missing individuals in the Savanna Creek area of the forest reserve north of the Crowsnest Pass.

Reported missing were 2 male individuals in their mid 40's, who had left Calgary and Black Diamond on the morning of Saturday September 22, to spend the day 4-wheeling. The two were due back home late the same evening. The subjects were reported missing to the Turner Valley RCMP by one of the individual's wife at 03:00 hrs, Monday, Sept 24th.

The decision was made to start a search the following day. Search teams from Crowsnest Pass Rescue, Pincher Creek SAR, Foothills SAR, Calgary SAR, as well as Conservation Officers and Forest Guardians from Pincher Creek and Blairmore were tasked. Pincher Creek SAR provided their mobile search base (SAR Car) for use as the search base. An overhead team was established with the RCMP, Alberta Conservation Officers, and members of Pincher Creek SAR.

After breaking the area down into an initial 17 search segments, teams were tasked into an area based on established POD's. Quad teams, vehicle teams, foot teams and mountain bike teams were utilized to cover a search area of more than 1000 sq. miles. As there was no point last seen, search managers used Savanna Creek as the search base and PLS. Search teams were instructed to travel all trails within their search segments that were accessible by a small 4-wheel drive truck. Trails searched were to be tagged with flagging tape, marked with the date / time /

tasked to search the area surrounding Savanna Creek, and spent approx. 45 minutes over the area. By day end, few clues had been discovered, and search managers decided to change the overall strategy to one of area / segment elimination.

Day 2 progressed much the same as day one. No clues were discovered by any of the search teams. A number of possible sightings of the missing individuals were reported, with one of the reports placing the subjects at Savanna Creek at 17:30 hrs on Saturday, with a stated intent of heading home. A number of other possible sightings of the vehicle along highway 3 near Pincher Creek required investigation by the RCMP. Day 2 ended with the decision to extend the search north, as the segments south towards the Crowsnest Pass were completed, and with a consensus that there would be a higher POD to the north. With the move to the north, a change in both RCMP and Alberta Parks Districts would occur, and search managers from Turner Valley and Kananaskis Country were notified and requested to send a manager(s) down for the later half of day 3 to bring them up to speed in preparation for a hand off. Additional search segments were added to the area north and east of the search area.

Day 3 involved a completion of the south half of the search area, and the extension of the search area to the north and east, along routes from Savanna Creek to Black Diamond, bringing the total number of segments to 22. Early in the afternoon, two additional sightings placed the subject vehicle at a well site immediately off secondary road 940 and hwy 532 junction, at 18:00 hrs. The location was in an area which had been covered by both ground and air teams. A decision was made to split off an area about 10%

search. Teams were placed into the area, and approximately 1.5 hrs later, the subjects were located, deceased. The subjects were stuck in a deep hole in a small creek, approx. 300 metres from hwy 940 in on a little used trail that was extremely difficult to notice unless one were aware of its existence. Both subjects succumbed to CO2 poisoning on Saturday night. The vehicle was situated such that it was not visible from over 30-50 feet away. Of note is that the area had been searched by 2 quad teams, a foot team and by air over the past two days, with searchers coming within approx. 100 yards of the vehicle.

After an intensive search, the outcome was both a relief and a great let down for many of the searchers. There was a great deal of disappointment felt by the searchers who covered the area on previous days. After returning to the site, it was easy to understand how the two were missed, although this helps only a little. The following morning a critical incident diffusing session was held, giving those whom attended the opportunity to discuss the details of the search. A debrief session was held the following week with many excellent suggestions resulting.

There were many challenges, from continuous media (both TV and print) coverage, the large search area to be covered, lack of clues, a large family presence (often the family / friends outnumbered the overhead team 5:1), managing large numbers of spontaneous volunteers and planning for a "complete handoff" to another jurisdiction are some that stand out. Overall, these challenges were overcome, and many lessons were

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The author, Bryan Sundberg, is a District Conservation Officer for the Beauvais Lake / Chain Lakes District of Alberta Parks & Protected Areas out of Pincher Creek.

Emergency Management & SAR School, Aug. 25-17, 2001

by Mary-Ann Warren, SARDA

With the enticement of the Mountains, who could resist not going to the ERI Emergency Management and SAR School held at Goldeye Center, Nordegg. Richard Smith, the host, brought in International Instructors from the U.S., U.K. and of course Canada with the quality proving to be outstanding.

The 3 days fulfilled the promise of having high quality courses for those from Tasking Agencies as well as the SAR Volunteer. Each course ran from 1/2 day to 2 days in length. The courses were varied in topics such as the Incident Command System, Rope and Slope Rescue 1, Mountain Bike SAR, Urban Search and more. Being a Dog Handler I certainly took in the POD Effectiveness for SAR Dogs which was presented by UK's Dave Perkins and Pete Roberts. I sat in on this talk at SARSCENE in

Montreal 2000, but being able to take it in for 1/2 a day led to a better understanding on the topic. With Disaster on everyone's minds there were selected topics to help one learn or upgrade their knowledge in corresponding subjects like, Efficient and Effective Operations of the EOC (Emergency Operations Center). And what would a Alberta SAR School be without an Advanced Man-tracking course or SAR Survival training. With being able to take in these lectures or workshops for more than a couple hours as they are presented in conferences, there is more information to be given out and less of a crunch trying to absorb it.

In the evenings, after a fabulous meal, all gathered to listen to presentations on several major disastrous events from around the world, presented by responders who were directly involved. Receiv-

ing information on disasters from those who were there, led to more information and questions as I'm sure these type of presentations are like a debriefing of sorts. There is something to be learned by how the disaster was handled and where mistakes were made, and more importantly on what worked right. Having the opportunity to take in courses such as these, also to be able to meet with and chat to various International Instructors, Tasking Agency personnel as well as SAR workers from around our province and beyond in a casual atmosphere was well worth my time to be there. The costs of this SAR School were very affordable with a variety of accommodations to be had. Of course the serene setting of Goldeye Lake made it possible to get out and clear one's head in time for the next lecture, workshop or the drive home.

"There is something to be learned by how the disaster was handled and where mistakes were made, and more importantly on what worked right. . . ."

SARVAC Update. . . . Monica Ahlstrom, President SARVAC

by Mary-Ann Warren, SARDA

Over the last year the major focus of SARVAC has been to secure funds for the ongoing administration and coordination of our organization. Earlier this year the Royal Bank Foundation stated they would donate \$80,000 to SARVAC for such needs. We are still waiting for these funds, which were held up due to staff changes and a re-evaluation of the funding requirements within the Foundation. We have been told that the funds are still forthcoming, but are waiting for written confirmation.

Because of our funding situation, it has not been possible for our entire Board to meet. However, we are still actively pursuing a number of projects. The first is our tax campaign, which would allow SAR volunteers to claim some of their equipment and training as a

legitimate expense. The program also calls for employers to receive a tax break if they allow an employee, who is a SAR member, to participate in a SAR mission or civil emergency response.

Another program we are continuing with is the Civil Emergency Response training program for search and rescue volunteers. We are working in conjunction with SAR Alberta and the Calgary Fire Department to develop a national program that would provide basic safety training for SAR volunteers who are called to civil emergencies, such as tornadoes, floods, ice storms, etc. The program is in the initial research stage. We will also be fundraising for this project, through grants, foundations and corporate sponsorship.

for coordination among different agencies, both professional and volunteer, has become even more apparent. SARVAC believes we have a strong role in ensuring that the ground SAR volunteer of Canada are represented and acknowledged at the federal level. Past experience tells us that if there is a major disaster search and rescue volunteers will be asked to respond. SARVAC believes the federal support this effort both morally and financially. To that end we will continue to present the needs of ground search and rescue volunteers to the federal government and develop programs that support volunteer ground search and rescue efforts.

For more information about SARVAC and its initiatives, access their website at:
www.sarvac.org

"... a national program that would provide basic safety training for SAR volunteers who are called to civil emergencies, such as tornadoes, floods. . . ."

Article Submissions— Articles from anyone within the Alberta SAR community are accepted. Articles should be a maximum of 250 words, and pictures are always welcomed (preferably digital as photos not guaranteed to be returned). We reserve the right to refuse or edit submissions based on available space and content. Deadline for Winter 2002 edition is Dec. 31, 2001, to John Rotheisler (see box Page 1 for contact information. We want to hear from you!



Government of Alberta News Release — November 7, 2001

Grant program focuses on municipal emergency response

Edmonton... A special grant initiative, provided by Municipal Affairs, will allow municipalities to provide additional training to their local fire and disaster services personnel as well as ground search and rescue volunteers.

Municipal Sponsorship Program funding highlights include:

- ? \$150,000 for the delivery of ground search and rescue training courses.
- ? Application packages for the...disaster services training initiative are being mailed to eligible municipalities and the deadline for applications is February 1, 2002.
- ? For further information watch the SAR Alberta website at <http://www.saralberta.org/>.

Pine Lake Memorial Ric Henderson, Disaster Services Officer

On July 14, 2000, in a few moments of terror, 12 precious lives were lost, hundreds of people were injured –both physically and emotionally, property was destroyed, and thousands of lives were changed forever. Rescuers traveled from across the province to help with the rescue mission at the Green Acres Campground and surrounding farms at Pine Lake.

One year later the sun shone down on a private memorial service in a newly planted memorial garden at a spot in the campground that had seen the greatest devastation. Families of the 12 who died gathered together with hundreds of campers and Pine Lake residents to remember those who lost their lives, and pay tribute to those who came to their aid. Ron Wolsey, Executive Director of Alberta Disaster Services read a message from Premier

Klein. Also speaking were Maurice Lewis- Red Deer County Council member, Lexy Fisher and daughter Stacy Osguthorpe- Green Acres owners, Shelley Lawrence of the Pine Lake community, and Bill Gourley, who lost his wife Lisa to the deadly storm spoke on behalf of the families. All spoke on the impact of the deaths and injuries, but also the spirit and compassion of those who came to the aid of the injured, selflessly giving of themselves, and putting their lives on hold to help strangers.

A memorial rock, ringed by twelve trees, was unveiled by an honour guard of Air Cadets. The rock, inscribed "A TRIBUTE TO A COMMUNITY WHICH SUFFERED GREAT LOSS, BUT SHOWED GREAT SUPPORT, COURAGE AND HEROISM. REMEMBERING THOSE WHO LOST THEIR LIVES IN THE PINE

LAKE TORNADO, JULY 14, 2000" and also containing the names of the twelve who lost their lives, will serve as a permanent memorial to that fateful day. After the service the Alberta flag, which had covered the memorial, was sent to the parents of two-year-old Lucas Holtom, the youngest victim.

The true meaning and importance of this day, to the families of the twelve, was reinforced by Bill Gourley who said " We have great memories of here, but, at the same time, our memories are of the time we lost our loved ones. But I think it's important for us during our grieving process to get through this day as a group, to remember our loved ones, and I know this is going to help in the long run".

Hopefully the day has accomplished that

"All spoke on the impact of the deaths and injuries, but also the spirit and compassion of those who came to the aid of the injured"

Nominations Needed Brett Wuth, Past President

Nominations will be received for the election of SAR Alberta's Treasurer and Vice-President at the AGM to be held in March, 2002. The position of Treasurer is a two year term. The position of Vice President is one year, with an automatic succession to the positions of President and Past President in the second and third year. For more information, please contact the Nominations Committee Chair, Brett Wuth (403)627-2460 wuth@acm.org.

Points to Ponder Editor

- ? **Regional elections** will be held for the positions of Director & Deputy Director in all SAR Alberta regions between now and the March 2, 2002 AGM. Contact your current Director or Deputy Director for information. (These individuals are identified at www.saralberta.org/About/board.html).
- ? **6th Annual Provincial SAR Conference** "When Disaster Strikes" – March 1, 2 & 3, 2002 in Edmonton. Registration information is available at www.saralberta.org.
- ? **Training Grant Class Rosters** – Must be submitted on completion of each class, as per directions on the form which can be downloaded at: www.saralberta.org/Training/ADSCClassList.pdf. Forms are still outstanding from last year and **must** be submitted before this year's applications will be accepted.