



The Official Newsletter of GPSAR **RESCUE ME**

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Greater Philadelphia Search & Rescue



2005 In Review

2005 was a great year for the growth and development of GPSAR. We would like to thank everyone who helped us to move forward. Special thanks go to the Montgomery County Office of Emergency Preparedness, Nextel and REI.

§ 4800 + person hours
training!

§ 1000 + person hours
of outreach and
public education.



Education / Outreach *Community Outreach*

GPSAR continues to participate in community outreach details that are scattered throughout the year. At these details, we help to educate people how to stay safe and to avoid needing the team's services. Nothing is more effective or rewarding in the long run than these outreach opportunities. The fall was a particularly busy time due to the large number of fire expositions that we attended. Of these, the largest is the one at Fort Washington but we also get a chance to interact with large numbers of the public at other fire expos such as the ones at Center Square and Levittown.



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Education

GPSAR offers Lost in the Woods classes to the public. The purpose of this class is to teach wilderness survival skills to children.

TRAINING TOPICS

Training Never Stops

The team continues to train twice a week, not including the training that individual members do on their own time. Team members have also taken advantage of opportunities for training offered by outside agencies. The Montgomery County Fire Academy opened up its rescue courses to team members. Classes attended include Water Rescue Awareness, High Angle Rescue, Confined Space Awareness, and Structural Collapse I. We are proud to say that the majority of our team members also took the NIMS course, which is soon to be the mandated standard for Incident Command. Team members have been taking courses online leading to certifications. These courses include SARTECIII offered by NASAR and Incident Command System offered by FEMA.



DCNR Field Team Member Test:

At the end of January, the team went to Fort Washington Park in Montgomery County for the DCNR Field Team Member test. A group of 15 GPSAR members took the FTM test while team members that had taken the test in previous years looked on and lent their support. Preparing for the test encouraged individuals on the team to sharpen their skills

Valuable opportunities for team members to train with other SAR groups are provided by SAREX events. A large group of team members traveled to Delaware in May to attend the SAREX there. Canine members found the cadaver dog training particularly interesting and some team dogs have subsequently been training for cadaver work on a regular basis. The Maryland SAREX in November also drew a sizeable contingent of GPSAR members.



SEARCHES – Berlin, Hawk Mountain & More

Berlin Search

In June, GPSAR was called out on a search to Berlin Park in Camden County New Jersey. The team worked with detectives and various police agencies on this search, but we were able to carry out the planning and operations aspects of our participation. Members of Maple Shade Rescue Squad also took part in the search. The day was very hot and humid, not ideal conditions for the team dogs and their handlers. Based on the briefing from the detectives on the case, the team knew going into the search that if the person were in the area that our mission was a recovery one. The gentleman had been missing for up to two weeks before we

were called out. GPSAR members were able to find the body of the missing man in about 5 hours after the team's arrival. Although the outcome was a sad one, the recovery of the remains allowed the family and friends of the man to obtain closure.



Park

PSARC UPDATE

Pennsylvania Search and Rescue Council (PSARC): A representative from PSARC came to the January monthly business meeting to encourage GPSAR to rejoin that organization. The team decided to send a contingent to the next PSARC meeting to be held in State College PA on February 11. A group of team members made the long trip to the meeting despite the prediction of the largest snowstorm for this winter. The trip home with the bus was quite interesting, to say the least, as the local area received over a foot of snow. After having a number of questions answered at the meeting, team leaders decided to join PSARC as a Level 2 team. Joining the organization will only strengthen GPSAR as we will be added to the PSARC callout book. Being a PSARC member will probably lead to the team being called out to more distant searches and more wilderness type searches. These changes will encourage the growth and development of the team and make it a stronger, more proficient unit.

Searches

Hawk Mountain Search for a missing Hunter

In December, GPSAR was called out to Hawk Mountain in Berks County to participate in the search for a 78 year old man who went missing while out hunting with friends on the first day of deer season. We were called out on the third day of the search. The previous days, the search was conducted by local agencies including local teams belonging to PSARC. The progress of the search was delayed by severe weather and authorities were very concerned as to whether the man could survive another night out in the woods without succumbing to hypothermia. Our team joined other SAR groups, local residents, and emergency services agencies on this search. Luckily, the man was spotted from the air by searchers in a helicopter late that afternoon. He was suffering from hypothermia but was otherwise fine.



Reading Search:

The team was called out to Berks County in early January to help detectives searching for a missing woman. The woman had been missing for two weeks and the detectives wanted searchers to rule out (clear?) an area near where her car was found abandoned. Also present on this search were members from other SAR groups (PSARC members?). Members of GPSAR carried out the planning phase for this search. Our certified dog teams were deployed and the other team members went out on tasks both with our own team dogs and with dog teams from other SAR groups. The area had a low probability of making a find but ensuring that the area was clear of clues or the woman herself was a valuable service to the authorities and the family. As a bonus, the opportunity to work with other SAR groups was an excellent learning experience for members of GPSAR. After teams of searchers cleared the area in question, the search was called off without finding any clues. The woman's body was found a week later well outside our search area.



Lansdale Search:

The team was called out soon after an 80 year old woman reported to be suffering from dementia was reported missing from her home in Montgomery County. The search was carried out by a number of agencies including members of GPSAR, fire fighters from several local stations (80 and 14), and members of local police agencies. There were also searchers in helicopters. GPSAR was allowed to run operations for the search, briefing and debriefing the tasks when they were sent out into the field and when they returned. The team leaders advised local authorities to get as much publicity as possible to the public to increase the odds of someone spotting the woman. We deployed the APRS trackers, tools that enabled the search leaders to monitor which areas had been searched and allowed the search area to expand as possible sightings of the woman came in to command. In the late afternoon, the woman was spotted by a member of the public and was quickly picked up by ambulance and taken to the hospital where she was luckily found to be OK.

DETAILS

Details: Fort Washington Pet Expo

Members of GPSAR are on track for a busy spring season for details. The first and the largest is the Fort Washington Pet Expo held for three days in March. These were a busy three days for the team as the GPSAR booth had to be covered the entire run of the pet expo. On display at the booth were team computers, one of which was running a Power point presentation showing the team training. GPSAR members talked to many people, both members of the public and other exhibitors. The team dogs are especially popular with the public. The pet expo is valuable as it gives the team an opportunity to educate the public on what we do, recruit new members, and receive donations to help cover our operating costs. There were a number of lost person reports and team members were sent out to search for several lost children. We were able to reunite a little girl with her family. Other lost people reports?



Meet the people of GPSAR

Michael Toren

Michael Toren first became involved with GPSAR in February of 2004, after learning of the team through a co-worker. A member of the Technical Rescue Unit, he has fondness for ropes, knots, and rigging. Michael assists with technical aspects of maintaining the team's web and email services, and the team's field computers used in conjunction with the tracking devices. This past December he was elected President for the 2006-2007 term. He is currently employed as a Software Engineer in the anti-spam division of Symantec.



Demonstration of trackers to Civil Air Patrol leaders

TECHNOLOGY – Tracking and more!

A new resource for GPSAR is the acquisition of three tracking devices and two GIS laptop workstations. The trackers combine GPS and packet radio capabilities in a compact unit. When a member of a task is carrying one of these units, people at command can follow the task's progress in real time as its path is plotted on a computer using GIS mapping software. These trackers were first deployed at the Berlin search. This technology allowed command to determine the path used by the task that made the find, allowed other resources to be directed to the find, and it also provided digital and hard copies to share with other agencies and for team records.

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