

Protection

Keeping Rescue Training Affordable — “The skills you will learn this week will someday save a life. It might be your own, your fellow rescuer’s, or a park visitor’s, but some day, someone in this class will save a life because they used skills that will be acquired this week.”

So went part of the introductory briefing given by course coordinator Ranger Rob Turan to this year’s trainees at the NPS Eastern High-Angle Rescue Course, held at Shenandoah this past April. We participate in a lot of training as NPS employees, and all of it is important. One would be hard pressed to find training that is more important than that which will help save lives.

Because the course coordinators know the value of such training, they go to great lengths to fill it each year and to make it as affordable as possible, both to parks and individuals. This sometimes takes creativity. This year’s course implemented four distinct ideas to help make it tuition-free.

1. Assistance from Other Agencies. Though primarily an NPS course, coordinators used other agencies this year, as they have in the past, to offer unique training opportunities and perspectives. In addition to NPS personnel, participants from New Jersey State Parks, Shenandoah Mountain Guides, Shenandoah volunteers and Shenandoah Mountain Rescue Group all played important roles in making the training as comprehensive as possible. Also notable, the U.S. Park Police Eagle 1 helicopter presented a block on litter and jungle penetrator hoist operations, which was a first for the course.
2. Military Expertise. Three U.S. Navy SEALs, an Air Force pararescue jumper and the director of the Navy’s Special Warfare Tactical Climbing Research and Development Unit joined the instructor cadre to offer their unique teaching abilities and to lend perspective on cutting-edge ideas. As in previous years, their collective expertise made indispensable contributions to the overall success of the course. The military helped absorb the cost of five instructors.
3. Rescue Equipment Manufacturer Sponsorship. Four representatives from the Petzl company attended a full day of training and ran two stations: fixed rope ascending/descending/changeover; and litter raise and lower. One of these reps came from France. Who can better demonstrate the use of certain rescue devices or articulate exact rescue procedures using said devices than reps from the company who builds them? Again, it was cutting-edge expertise, all of it on Petzl’s dime, and they even donated some equipment for use during the course.
4. Support from the Washington Office. For years, the eastern rescue course has persevered on a shoestring budget or no budget at all. Instructors’ home parks have absorbed their travel costs, the host park has provided the majority of equipment, and handout materials have been generated locally. This year Dan Pontbriand, the NPS branch chief of emergency services, provided support with several much-needed ropes, printed manuals and miscellaneous equipment. Moreover, Pontbriand, who has an impressive rescue background of his own, spent an entire day with the class, speaking with students and instructors, evaluating the quality of the training, assisting with skill stations and getting on-rope himself. Pontbriand saw the extraordinary degree of learning that occurs during this week. Coordinators are confident that WASO’s support will continue and hopefully expand in the future.

It is our hope to never charge tuition for this outstanding rescue course. We have accomplished this for 12 years. By continuing to use other agencies, manufacturer sponsorship, military expertise and support from WASO, we will continue to make this training available and affordable to any interested rescue-affiliated individual, regardless of their financial resources.

This goal is a lofty one, but no more lofty than the ultimate reason we train at all: “That others may live.”

~ Kevin Moses, Big South Fork

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Resource Management

Sue Consolo Murphy's column will return next quarter.

NOTE: Are you in resource management and interested in becoming a columnist in this space? Please contact the editor at fordedit@aol.com.