

# Make a difference: Search and Rescue calls for volunteers

By Casey Crow  
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The Upper San Juan Search and Rescue (USJSAR) is currently looking for additional volunteers.

USJSAR is a volunteer organization that operates throughout all four seasons training and organizing volunteers in search, rescue and other emergency services.

The guidelines and protocols of the USJSAR state, "There is no 'glory' in mountain rescue. Although there may be great personal satisfaction, participation in a search, rescue or recovery involves long periods of waiting followed by long periods of very hard and disagreeable work ... A successful mission depends as integrally upon the member monitoring the radio as it does upon the rescuer attending the patient. Whenever possible we stress the work of the group at the expense of the contribution of any single individual."

Volunteering with USJSAR is no easy task. As any member will tell you, there are many challenges, but it is also a highly rewarding way to contribute to the community.

Mike Le Roux, Deputy of Emergency Management, first applied to join the team after witnessing the USJSAR in action.

"Personally, I applied to join the search and rescue team through an incident that occurred in which my wife was involved in a horse accident. The SAR team mobilized immediately and I was able to watch firsthand at what an amazing group of dedicated individuals was able to accomplish in that situation. I knew at that point that I wanted to be part of the USJSAR team. Nothing compares to the opportunity to use one's skills to potentially save or restore a life," he told The SUN.

Other volunteers joined to find like-minded friends while also giving back to the community.

"One of the first things I did

after moving to Pagosa Springs four years ago was joining SAR. Like other members I wanted to be a part of and give back to the community. But I also had some ulterior motives: meet other adventurous outdoor people and get training to improve my skills and safety," Jim Bodoh explained.

According to the protocol, each mission has its own unique conditions and must be evaluated by all members at the scene. Effective risk management comes from experience, proper training and good personal judgment.

Some of the past missions listed on the USJSAR website include evacuating a 12-year-old female hiker with an injured ankle, rescuing an injured female backpacker on the Continental Divide Trail, searching for a missing airplane, responding to ATV accidents and searching for missing hunters.

For Terry Baker, one mission stands out in particular. In the early 2000s a young man on a hunting trip slipped off the side of a cliff. He fell 80 feet to a small ledge, where he was stuck for three days and two nights.

"A group of us went up by helicopter for a technical rope rescue. We set up a main line above the subject's location, then I roped up and was lowered to the subject. He was dehydrated, weak, very cold and in shock, and during a very emotional moment, he showed me a picture of his family. I told him we were definitely going to get him home," Baker shared.

"There is always someone that needs help. Being part of a team that has helped someone out of a difficult situation, getting them back safely to their family and friends is extrinsically motivating and rewarding. We have such diversity amongst our volunteers — everyone brings their own unique value to the team, and we are always looking for great people," Le Roux said.

Rewarding as the work is, being a part of USJSAR comes with difficulties as well.



Photo courtesy Mike Le Roux

**Members of the Upper San Juan Search and Rescue (USJSAR) team engage in a training session off the side of a cliff. The USJSAR is a volunteer organization that serves the community by training and organizing volunteers in search, rescue and other emergency services. Volunteers gain experience in wilderness first aid, navigation, rappelling, ropes rescue, communications and technology and survival. The USJSAR is currently looking for new members.**

"I think the most challenging part of SAR is that our missions often don't come at convenient times. Lost people often wait till dark to call or we're going out because the weather is life-threatening to someone. The rewards come from the gratitude shown by someone we've rescued or knowing that you've actually saved someone's life," Bodoh told The SUN.

Members of the USJSAR will learn a wide variety of skills, including wilderness first aid, navigation, rappelling, ropes rescue, communications and technology,

and survival.

There are openings for individuals with experience in hiking, climbing, horses, four-wheelers, snowmobiles, communications and administration.

"I do SAR because I want to feel useful and help people. SAR is a good match to my skills with communications, computers, hiking and camping. I haven't been counting, but I think I have been involved in over 150 incidents in the last 5 years," Duncan Lawrie said.

Those interested in becoming a volunteer should attend a train-

ing meeting where they can fill out an application.

Trainings are typically held on the second and fourth Thursday of each month beginning at 6:30 p.m.

The application, once turned in either at the meeting or a later date, will be submitted to the Sheriff's Department for a background check.

Upon approval, applicants must attend three training meetings in six months, as well as two missions within a year.

Applicants can then be voted into the organization by the board. To maintain active sta-

tus, new members will then be required to attend two missions within the year.

Members of USJSAR are expected to maintain good physical condition and high moral standards.

If you are interested in becoming a member of the USJSAR, you can find the meeting schedule and additional information online at <http://uppersanjuan-searchandrescue.org/index.htm>.

For further information, contact the USJSAR at [usjsar@gmail.com](mailto:usjsar@gmail.com).

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