

# Rescue helicopter brings on two RNs



By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe's Calstar base is now fully staffed at eight with the arrival of Stephen Poehls and Nathan Schwab.

Poehls and Schwab joined the Tahoe outfit late last year. Poehls had been doing the same type of work in Montana, while Schwab had worked between the Calstar bases in Salinas and Gilroy since September 2008.

"I went to Northstar-at-Tahoe (in December) and transported a patient that hit a tree. It was the first time I came into a very snowy landing zone," Schwab said.

Winter is the busiest time of year for Calstar's Tahoe base because of all the ski related injuries. Landing at a resort "on snow or in a parking lot" is not uncommon.

Assault victims are who Schwab was used to treating when working at the bases south of San Jose.

One of the reasons Poehls wanted to work in Lake Tahoe is because he would be in a similar mountain environment compared to where he came from. He and his fiancée, who is a nurse practitioner at Carson Tahoe Hospital, were also ready for a change. They are living in Minden.

Poehls said the crew in Tahoe works well together and is tight knit.

“We communicate with one another so we can overcome a lot of things having to work in a helicopter,” Poehls said. “We decide things before we put the patient in the aircraft to be efficient.”

The registered nurses work two 24-hour shifts each week. When they aren’t on a call, they are training. They have sleeping facilities at Lake Tahoe Airport so they never leave when on duty. It’s similar to a firehouse.

The Tahoe crew has traveled as far south as Mammoth, into eastern Nevada, west to about Georgetown and north to Susanville.

The next closest Calstar helicopter is in Jackson. It can be moved to Placerville to act as backup for Tahoe and Vacaville. It takes that bird 18 minutes to get from Placerville to South Tahoe.

The Tahoe crew regularly transports people to Barton Memorial Hospital, but also to Reno hospitals that have more advanced medical facilities.

Calstar, which stands for California Shock/Trauma Air Rescue, started in 1984 in San Mateo. The operation at Lake Tahoe Airport began in 2001. The fixed wing and helicopter air ambulances have eight bases in Northern California.