

Calstar in the air at a moment's notice to help those in need

By Carlos Alcalá, Sacramento Bee

After dark, on a moonless Wednesday last week, the El Dorado County Sheriff's Office received three 911 hang-up calls from within Desolation Wilderness, near Eagle Lake.

Uncertain of exactly where the caller was, the Sheriff's Office did what it has done many times before: It radioed Calstar 6 – the non-profit rescue and air transport helicopter service in South Lake Tahoe.



Calstar has a base at Lake Tahoe Airport.
Photo/LTN file

“We are the only emergency aircraft located in the Tahoe basin ... available 24 hours a day, seven days a week,” said Tom Pandola, Sierra Nevada regional director for Calstar.

Calstar's Messerschmitt Bo 105 was already up in the air, and pilot Luca Dell'Anese turned it around to look for the possible caller.

Anyone whose commercial flight has come into Sacramento over the Sierra knows how featureless the backcountry can appear in

the dark.

However, Dell'Anese and flight nurse Stephen Poehls were both equipped with night-vision goggles – a \$15,000 piece of gear that allows them to spot a cellphone screen at night from 1,000 feet above.

Read the whole story