

Calstar provides fast transport in an emergency

By Kathryn Reed

In many ways it's an emergency room or intensive care unit that flies.

Calstar – or California Shock Trauma Air Rescue – has a base at Lake Tahoe Airport that makes runs down to Mammoth, far into Nevada, up to Quincy and over to Georgetown. But much of the work the pilots and flight nurses do starts on the South Shore.

The air ambulance often finds people who are lost in the wilderness, whisks them from the backcountry and delivers them to the appropriate hospital to get further treatment. Two critical care certified nurses are on each flight. Some of the care patients receive is equivalent to what a doctor would do in the ER.



Calstar can land in many locations – including the middle of Highway 50.

Photo/LTN file

Many trips are made between Barton Memorial Hospital and facilities that have specialties the South Shore care center

doesn't have.

This time of year the helicopter is busy with getting injured skiers from the slopes to the appropriate medical facility.

Night vision goggles, like what the military uses, help find people on the ground. With most everyone having a cell phone, the pilot will ask the lost person to turn their phone around and wave it. That is the easiest way for a pilot to see someone on the ground at night.

Bryan Pond, one of the two original members who opened the South Lake Tahoe operations in October 2001, spoke at the Soroptimist International Tahoe Sierra meeting last week about Calstar.

Last week was Critical Care Transport Nurses Day.

"On Feb. 18, 1943, the first class of flight nurses marched from the base chapel after graduating from their specialized course of medical training at Bowman Field in Louisville, Ky. On this day, the new field of transport nursing emerged as a specialty as both the Army and Navy instituted flight nurse programs," Pond, who is a flight nurse, told *Lake Tahoe News*. "These nurses were trained to care for wounded soldiers during transport on converted cargo planes and on the field of battle. Since that time, nurses have expanded their role in this field to include the civilian sector, responding to care for patients in ambulances, helicopters and airplanes."

Not all trips are of a life and death nature. Sometimes it's a simple broken ankle. The problem could be the injured person is miles from his or her vehicle and can't walk out or be carried out by friends. Calstar can get to most any location.

The California Highway Patrol helicopter crewmen work with Calstar on rescues at Lovers Leap because they can hoist people down. Then they bring the rock climber to Calstar, which is waiting in a meadow.

CareFlight is another partner agency. They have helicopters in Gardnerville, Reno and Auburn.

There are times when so much is going that multiple medical helicopters are circling about.

The Calstar helicopter can take two patients at once depending on their weight.

It's run as a nonprofit that includes membership. Members may use the service for free after their insurance is billed. For more info, go online.