

# Search crews a safety net for recreationists

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – Weekend warriors may not be prepared for the elements, but a cadre of volunteers has their backs.

Those volunteers come with varied backgrounds. Often their day job has nothing in common with rappelling down a slab of granite to find a hiker, or jumping into rushing water to save a capsized kayaker, or performing first aid on an injured outdoor enthusiast.

Ryder Evans and Chris Kozłowski with El Dorado County's Search and Rescue spoke last week at the Sorooptimist International of South Lake Tahoe meeting at Harrah's Lake Tahoe about what they encounter on assignments.

While they work with El Dorado County Sheriff's Department, they are not employees, they buy their own gear, they are not compensated, they work at all hours of the day and night, and what they do is risky.

The night before the Tahoe group – of which there about 35 members – had been called out to Gilmore Lake in Desolation Wilderness to find a couple hikers who got nervous because they didn't think they could get out before darkness set in. They were in shorts, had no water and were above the tree line. The crew found them and everyone walked out.

Evans said using a cell phone to contact SAR is ideal – assuming it's a true emergency – because cell phone pings often are within 300 meters of the person. It can be as much as 1,000 meters, and that can be problematic.

“We'll spend a lot of time trying to figure out where you

are," Ryder said.

Sometimes SAR gains access to phone records to know the last text sent or call made. They look for vehicles.

Dogs are a big part of crews, especially for El Dorado County, which has three. Kozłowski is one of those handlers. She has Mika.

It was a colleague of hers who found Carson May, the Sugar Bowl ski instructor, who went missing in January because a presumed avalanche swept him to his death.

"It's finding what shouldn't be there," Kozłowski said of what the dogs look for.

People are out of place in the wilderness. It could also be a cell phone or other object a dog homes in on. A dog's keen sense of smell is what makes them so valuable. They can find people buried 6-feet deep in an avalanche, or circle above water with a person 30-feet deep in water.

It's best if they can get an object with the missing person's scent. This could be a swab taken from the vehicle. Kozłowski joked that people should leave a pair of dirty socks in a bag at home – just in case you go missing.

Of course telling someone your plans is another good idea so crews will have a better idea where to search.

The top reasons why SAR is called out:

- Lights went out – (AKA – darkness) This is more common in winter when days are shorter.
- Lost the trail.
- Parties split up.
- Maleitist – especially for guys between 20 and 34.

- Bad choices.
- Poor job of calculating distance and time.
- Lower leg injuries.
- Poor communication.
- People afraid of animals.
- Mechanical failures.
- It's easy to call 911. "A lot of times we say if you didn't have 911, you wouldn't call us," Ryder said.

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**Note:**

- There will be a fundraiser for El Dorado County Search and Rescue's Tahoe unit on June 22 at 7pm at Riva Grill in South Lake Tahoe. Cost is \$22, which includes a buffet and live music.