

Ski patrollers have ambulances on their backs

By Heather Hansman, Ski

Breckenridge ski patroller Hunter Mortensen says it never fails. The instant patrol responds to someone seriously sick or injured on the hill, a doctor skis by. “They want to help but they’re used to perfect light and perfect conditions,” Mortensen says. “Then they see me on my hands and knees managing an airway and they ski away.”

And, luckily for the on-slope patient, Mortensen has what he likes to call “an ambulance in his backpack.” He’s used to starting IVs, stabilizing vitals, and initiating other invasive medical procedures that were formerly restricted to emergency rooms—on the side of a ski run.

Mortensen is part of a bigger movement, mostly invisible to happily oblivious skiers, to raise the level of on-hill medical care.

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