

## PTSAR welcome letter

The intent of this letter is to welcome you to Pine Tree Search and Rescue (PTSAR), give you some back ground, answer questions, and help you prepare for what we will be called to do. I will use a frequently asked question format.

### **What is PTSAR?**

Prior to the formation of PTSAR the search and rescue team covering southern Maine was the York County Emergency Response Rescue Team (YCERRT) which was managed by the York County Emergency Management Agency (YCEMA). At that time the team had specialty teams within it and included high angle, swift water/dive, K9, and ground search team. Over the years swift water/dive activities were moved to local fire, Maine Warden Service (MWS), and state police dive teams. K9 teams are now coordinated by Maine Search and Rescue Dogs (MESARD), and high angle rescue opportunities are few and far between in southern Maine and are now handled by local fire crews who are able to respond more quickly than volunteer teams. YCERRT slowly became smaller and smaller. There was an attempt to revitalize the team and there was momentum building when on 2012-05-04 the YCEMA chose to disband the team.

With the encouragement of our local Game Warden, Rick LaFlame, a few of the YCERRT team members decided form a new team. Bryan Courtois, Larry DeHof and Dan Pierce spearheaded getting the word out and attracting potential team members. On 2012-07-25 a meeting was held at Cabela's in Scarborough and PTSAR was born. At later meetings officers were elected and bylaws were drafted and approved. On 2012-09-11 PTSAR became a MASAR certified Unit. On 2013-01-23 PTSAR received 501(c)(3) status.

Maine has 15 SAR teams throughout the state. PTSAR's primary field of coverage is "southern" Maine but will get dispatched anywhere in the state we are needed. Because of our proximity to New Hampshire, we are also on call with the New Hampshire Fish and Game

### **What is in it for me?**

Good question. If you are seeking glory, you may as well stop reading and not bother joining. There is no room for people who want attention. We are asked to do a job that is quite often done in difficult conditions such as heat and or cold, winds, dark, thick brush, bugs, mud, snow, etc. You will not be on TV and will not be interviewed by the news, if you are approached by either you are to refer them to the Communication Officer. You will get a thank you from the MWS if they have time. You will get a thank you from the team leader and the family of the person we are looking for will be thankful but may not see you to say it in person. For most people who do SAR work they are doing it to help out. Most are avid outdoors people who are helping their peers. We do also get many calls for people who are despondent, or suffer from dementia or other mental illness.

We sometime get discounts on some outdoor gear.

### **How much does it cost?**

Most people who join PTSAR will already have most of the gear they need. If you hike, hunt, backpack, or spend time doing things outside you will most likely already have all of the clothing and things you would want in your ready pack. About the only specialized piece of gear we use is a two way radio. We have had good luck with the Baofeng UV5R which will cost about \$40 on Amazon or less on eBay. We do use GPS but the MWS will supply them if needed and you do not have one of your own.

### **What does it take to join?**

All it takes is a desire to help and be part of PTSAR. Fill out the application, send in your dues (\$20.00) and get started. After reviewing your application we will send you information to MASAR's on line Basic Search and Rescue (BASAR) course. The intent is that you will go through the material at your own pace and the on line material combined with your own personal experience and team meetings and trainings you would eventually be prepared to take the field skills test as one step to being a MASAR certified Search Team Member (STM).

In order to be a MASAR STM applicants must complete a detailed training course as well as demonstrating proficiency in both day and night navigation and survival including building a shelter and building a fire. You must also pass a fitness test, have current first aid and CPR, complete the ICS-100 course, and get a letter of recommendation from a unit officer. Full requirements and check lists can be found in the Standards section of the MASAR website.

### **What do my dues get used for**

Your dues cover administrative costs for running the team. These include dues to the Maine Association for Search and Rescue, the pinetreesar.com domain and email, registration for the trailer, patches, stickers, costs associated with the team annual meeting, and other expenses. We do not do fund raising and membership dues appear to be sufficient to cover our needs.

### **How often do we meet or get called for a search?**

We try to meet once per month and try to find a balance between indoor classroom type meetings and actually getting outside to practice the skills we use. We do not have a minimum number of meetings or trainings that must be attended. We understand that you have a life and other commitments such as school, jobs, family, and other things competing for your time. If you have time for PTSAR, great, if not that is OK as well. We feel that the bigger the pool of potential resources the greater our chances of being able to field a useful team. That said if you are constantly absent from meetings and trainings you are less likely to be the first one called for a search.

### **How long does a search last?**

Searches can last minutes to several days, weeks, months, or years. We work closely with the MWS and they try to give us as much notice as possible that we may be called. It is not uncommon for us to be notified of a search in process only to get notified a short time later that the person we would have been looking for has been found. We also get called to searches that are a long distance from where we live and we have no idea how long they will last. When we respond to a search we should be prepared to be self-sufficient for 24 hours with what is in our ready pack and ideally should show up with the ability to spend the night and continue searching the next day if needed. That said if we get called and the search goes into a second day and you can't stay, you are not obligated to stay.

### **What is provided at the command post?**

You just never know. A lot depends on the infrastructure in the area and the support staff at the CP. There have been times when we arrive at the CP to find that we have flush toilets, hot coffee, and breakfast sandwiches. When we returned to the CP after our initial assignment we were given sandwiches, cold drinks, and places to sit in a warm building. At the end of the day the townsfolk had turned out and supplied us with more food than we could eat and we were offered places to spend the night. We have also had nothing at the CP except what we brought with us. The further the search area from home the more you should expect to bring and could include a tent, cot, portable stove and cooking utensils, food, extra water, changes of clothes and overnight gear. You may find a hotel and local restaurant or you might pitch a tent.

### **What level of fitness is required?**

There are a couple basic fitness tests that MASAR uses, the most common is the pack carry which consists of covering 2 miles with a 25 pound pack in under 30 minutes. However stamina seems to be on equal ground as speed. We could be tasked to hike a series of trails looking for a lost hiker or we could spend hours pushing through thick brush doing a grid search or if the person is found we may be asked to assist in carrying the person out.

### **What should I do to be ready for a search?**

Pre-planning is key. Have your ready pack packed and ready. Have your overnight bag packed and ready. Have a talk with your boss, child care provider, spouse and family about being called for a search. Have things in place before you get called or have a plan ready to act on. Be prepared for just about anything. You can always pull gear out of your pack once you get your assignment. You should be part of the solution and not part of the problem.

### **How will I get notified of a search?**

You will get a message to your phone or email, whichever you identify as your primary contact. When you get the call for a search you should reply as soon as possible that

you are able to respond. You then may get information about a team gathering location and time to car pool or caravan to the search area.

You will also get reminders of meetings and trainings sent to your secondary contact. If you use your phone for everything, all communication will go to your phone.

### **Can I be involved if I do not want to go into the woods?**

Yes! There are many tasks that need to be done that do not include actually going in the woods. Managing the team web site, and Face Book page, and dealing with administrative tasks and record keeping take time. If you actually go to the search you could be tasked with shuttling people and dogs to and from their search area, running errands for the IC, such as getting pizza, etc.

### **How do I get time off from work?**

**Sec. 1. 26 MRSA c. 7, sub-c. 4-D** chapter 329 protects **certified** MASAR team members from discrimination, or discipline by their employers for time lost due to responding to a SAR incident. There are specific details that must be met and the employee must supply certain documents to their employer for the law to be applicable. Contact either the team president or secretary for details.