

Search-and-rescue program gives youths duty, direction

NEIGHBORS

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LOOKING FOR adventure? Maryland Search and Rescue (MSAR) might be just what you're looking for.

Accredited by the Appalachian Search and Rescue Conference and the Mountain Rescue Association, MSAR Venture Crew 616 held an open house for prospective members May 6 at the Red Cross Building on Vantage Point Road in west Columbia.

Maryland Search and Rescue is a co-educational professional search-and-rescue program associated with the Boy Scouts of America. The program trains adults and youths ages 14 to 21 in wilderness search and rescue, emergency response and outdoor survival skills. The group responds to requests for assistance from local, state or federal authorities to provide all-weather, lost-person search-and-rescue missions in the mid-Atlantic region.

Calls for help can come in the middle of the night. "The operations often start about 3 in the morning because they want people out at first light to get started," said Art Ross, chairman of the Crew committee, which oversees the group's operations.

Dana Dunbar, a senior at Long Reach High School, said it might be necessary to leave school early to participate in a mission. "We've already established with our teachers that we are a part of an organization that is involved with lost-person search and rescue. When there's a search, we're free to go and do that task," he said.

Pamela Paulding is senior adviser for Crew 616. She got involved when her son, Clayton, 23, joined the program years ago. Her daughter, Alice, a 16-year-old junior at Hammond High School, is a training officer for Crew 616.

"People often ask how it is that this program is so successful," Pamela Paulding said. "I have to say it's because teen-agers really like having a mission and feeling that what they do matters. ... People think of 14- to 16-year-olds as someone who still has to be reminded to make their bed. In a program like this, they get to know that when they go out on a search, they can make a difference in somebody's life."

Ian Ross, 20, joined the group almost seven years ago. His father, Art Ross, joined at the same time. Ian is considered one of the group's experts in rock climbing, extreme winter climbing and ice climbing, and he has been involved in about 25 rescue missions.

"When I started, I had no experience," he said. "Then I got hooked with the backpacking trips that we do monthly and other kinds of training. A few years ago, I would have said I didn't even feel comfortable going car camping, but now I feel very comfortable going on month long backpacking trips into the wilderness."

Ian spent 28 days practicing his mountaineering skills on glaciers in Alaska two years ago. He hopes to become an instructor for Outward Bound or National Outdoor Leadership School.

"This group kind of gave me a place to go and showed me what I want to do with my life," he said.