

## Not Out of the Woods Yet? These Howard County-Based Rescuers Can Help

Maryland Search & Rescue BSA Venture Crew 616 assists police and other emergency crews in the wilderness.

By **Howard Feintuch** | December 26, 2010



If you are lost, they will find you.

They are the Maryland Search and Rescue BSA Venture Crew 616, a group that works with police and other emergency crews in wilderness areas. They help to rescue and evacuate those who are injured, help to locate those who are lost, and even help investigators look for evidence.

Seth Tavera, a 17-year-old from Howard County, has worked for the last year-and-a-half to be certified to go on search and rescue missions. He trained for the opportunity as a youth member of the venture crew 616, which holds weekly meetings every Monday (from 7 p.m to 9 p.m. at Mt. Zion United Methodist Church, 12430 Scaggsville Road, Highland).

"I like knowing that I'll be able to help people," Tavera said.

To complement the weekly meetings, the group also holds monthly weekend training sessions, during which simulation searches take place.

For one of the group's weekend training sessions, one member was selected to be "lost" in a wooded area. Other members were then responsible to find the "lost" member.

Training exercises like these prepare members for actual rescues.

The exercise began on a Friday evening and ran through Sunday afternoon.

A recent Monday evening meeting focused on the proper protocol for rescuing an incapacitated person from a steep hillside, one where the terrain has trees and other potential natural obstacles.

Carl Solomon, the incoming senior advisor of the group, led a discussion on the topic before the group practiced a training drill applying what they learned.

As of November, the group had eight to 10 active youth members (ranging in age from 15 to 21, although teens can join the group at 14) and 15 to 20 active adults (age 21 and up). And most of them are Howard County residents, according to Solomon.

The adults serve as advisors to the youth, but they all train together to become certified to go on search and rescue missions.

Though the group is a Boy Scouts of America program, this rescue crew is open to men and women, according to Pamela Paulding, who was senior advisor to MSAR BSA Venture Crew 616 for a decade before retiring in 2008.

"It is also a leadership program," Paulding said. "Beyond that, it is an opportunity to do an enormous amount of community service."

Members must go through extensive training before they can be certified to go on search and rescue missions, she said.

"All of our training starts with the premise that in order to be effective as a searcher, you have to be able to take care of yourself in the woods," she said. "We start with the basics."

Those basics include knowing how to dress, what kinds of foods to pack in order to keep up your strength, and learning how to purify water.

As members master a skill, they are introduced to new ones.

"To develop strength, members do a lot of back-packing. We do things [in training] that might be scary to people, like rock climbing and whitewater rafting. Because if you do things that might scare you, it helps you develop a sense of confidence and gives you courage to be in the woods for long hours," Paulding said.

Search and rescue missions may take place during day or night and under a variety of weather conditions.

"You learn the introductory skills at meetings and then apply those skills on weekend trips. Once we feel someone has mastered the basic skills and we feel confident that they are able to take care of themselves, then we teach them how to take care of other people," Paulding said.

This second level of training can include simulation exercises.

One exercise that Paulding described involved finding someone with a "broken leg." The members are then called upon in response, for example, to make a makeshift splint and then a litter (a stretcher-like piece of equipment) to carry the "injured" person out of the woods.

The third level of training is more specialized. That level includes land navigation, during which rescuers may start working in more complex situations, such as where there is snow on the ground.

Certified rescuers assist in manual "carryouts," as well as helicopter-based rescues.

"If you are interested in a life of adventure and making a difference in the world," Paulding said, "joining this group is a great place to start."

On the Web:

[www.msar616.com](http://www.msar616.com).