

Urban teens get instruction on search and rescue

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Kelly Naylor is used to teaching youngsters search and rescue techniques. But this summer's recruits are a little different.

"It is my first time teaching someone with no previous experience," said Ms. Naylor, a member of Columbia Explorer Search and Rescue Post 616, a 45-member volunteer organization that assists in finding downed airplanes and people lost in rural areas.

Instead of working in a rural environment this summer, four Explorer members are spending six weeks teaching 34 high school students from the Washington area rescue and survival techniques from a simulated survival course.

The program began June 27. The group meets six hours a day, five days a week at the Margaret M. Washington Career High School in Northwest Washington.

At the end of the program, the youngsters -- mostly 14- and 15-year-olds -- will be certified "first responders." They are the ones who arrive first in search and rescue missions and are certified to perform cardiopulmonary resuscitation.

"It's a great opportunity to expose people to something they've never known before and give them a skill they can contribute to their own community," said Ms. Naylor, 18, a recent graduate of Oakland Mills High School and a four-year member of the Explorer group.

Peter McCabe, an adviser to the Howard Community College-based group, formed the new program to train the Washington youngsters in basic first aid, injured patient evacuation techniques, and other search and rescue services and emergency services programs.

Explorers -- a coeducational organization whose members range from high school age to the mid-50s -- will also teach skills such as wilderness navigation and rock climbing, knot tying for harnessing of climbers, map techniques and compass use.

The program is the first phase of a two-year effort to develop the D.C. Emergency Service Corps to conduct search and rescue operations to assist local police and fire departments.

"These young adults are pioneer members," Mr. McCabe said.

Ian Wienholt, the Explorer program manager, says the youngsters eventually will be certified to conduct urban searches and rescues instead of having the missions done solely by area police and fire departments.

The missions, Mr. Wienholt said, may involve searches for victims of collapsed buildings and bridges. He called the youths' efforts "less search and more rescue."

"Urban youth who are interested in the health-related fields can come to Margaret M. Washington and get a taste of what the field is like," Mr. Wienholt said.

During training last week, Mr. McCabe was intent on making sure the youths understood the importance of the program.

"They don't know this is exciting and productive. They may be viewing it as just another summer program," he said.