



Santa Maria Times

Pulitzer Central Coast Newspapers

Friday, October 22, 2004

S.B. County crew helps rescue Sierra hikers

By Janene Scully/Associate Editor

Santa Barbara County search-and-rescue team members helped get four members of a Santa Cruz winemaking family to safety after they were stranded by an early season snowstorm in the Sierras east of Fresno.

"It was very exciting to see that they were OK and we were able to locate them pretty quickly," said Jenna Endres from Santa Barbara County Search and Rescue. "It was a good feeling. They were very grateful to see us. They were in very good spirits, considering the ordeal they'd been through."

Rescuers had just a three-hour window of clear weather Thursday to locate and retrieve the four campers, who were reported missing after not returning home Sunday. The campers were identified as Paul Bargetto, 47, his brother-in-law Frank Horath, 45, and their sons, Michael Bargetto, 20, and Dominic Horath, 16.

"We were very lucky to get them out," Endres said.

From perches inside a helicopter, the Santa Barbara County crew - team leader Jennifer Beyer, Rick Stein, James Merrick and Mike LeMonaco joined Endres on this mission - spotted the campers late Thursday morning. Senior Deputy Doug Jones, search-and-rescue team leader, remained at the command post and acted as liaison to the campers' family.

Since the military Chinook helicopter couldn't land close by, the search-and-rescue members jumped as the aircraft hovered 2 feet above the ground, and used snow shoes to reach the missing men.

"There was a lot of snow," Endres said.

After providing food and hot chocolate along with a set of fresh clothes to replace soaking wet outfits, the campers were led back to the helicopter landing zone.

"The actions that they took really saved their lives," said Endres. "We got them out, but they made some really smart decisions."

Those included letting people know where they were going and intended to return, leaving a note on their vehicle and staying put when the snowstorm hit, according to Endres.

"We had a good idea where they were and that was really key in making this a success," she said.

* Associate Editor Janene Scully can be reached at 739-2214 or by e-mail at janscully@pulitzer.net.