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Kent County Search and Rescue team locates the missing

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 2012

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A child is missing.

He's been gone for a few hours. It's now dark and the temperature is hovering in the teens. Finding the child soon is critical for survival.

After an initial call to the 911 Dispatch Center, two police officers show up. They ask questions, look around a bit and decide to call the Kent County Search and Rescue (KCSAR) team for additional help.

Within a short period of time, several KCSAR team members arrive with their equipment and dogs and immediately start searching. Soon enough, they find the child and bring him home safely.

This story ends well because the KCSAR team is organized, efficient and extremely well-trained. But none of them get paid to do this -- they're all volunteers. They buy their own equipment and use their own vehicles and gas. And most of them spend more than 100 hours each year on search and rescue missions.

Why do they do it?

"Someone's got to do this -- there's a true need for it," says Brian Toronyi, deputy director - human resources. "If it's your loved one, you would hope there are people trained and skilled who do what we do."

The KCSAR team includes 57 dedicated volunteers expertly trained to safely locate, assist, stabilize and transport missing persons in Kent County and surrounding communities.

Duke, Emma, Gracie and Gus help locate people too, but only with their noses. These four dogs make up the K9 search and rescue team. They're each owned and handled by KCSAR volunteers and go through



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grueling training before working in the field.

KCSAR began in 2004 at the request of the Kent County Sheriff's Department Emergency Management Division. The team is a division of the Kent County Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service (RACES) group and both groups fall under the jurisdiction of the Emergency Management Division.

The KCSAR team involves smaller units tasked with different search and rescue responsibilities: ground, bike, K9, communications and the management unit, which is responsible for investigations, planning and operations. Many volunteers operate in more than one group.

When a missing person call reaches Toronyi, he admits it's "an adrenaline rush." On average, KCSAR gets 50 calls per year, but only half turn into actual searches. Many situations are resolved before the team arrives. So far this year, they've had 12 successful searches.

The KCSAR team has a scientific method for locating the missing, which are commonly children, elderly people or those with mental impairments. When they first arrive on the scene, they begin with a three-page questionnaire that gives them a better idea of who the person is, what their habits are and their mental and emotional states. This information is then compared to a database, along with the time and location where the person was last seen. The volunteers then know about how far in any direction that person could have gone and what signs to look for.

"This gives us the ability to understand the situation as best as we can," Toronyi says.

KCSAR is always looking for more volunteers, but Toronyi cautions that it's a big financial and time commitment. Initially, volunteers spend approximately 100 hours in training for the first several months before they go in the field. The backpack filled with supplies they each carry on search and rescue missions can cost up to \$1200.

Current volunteers include both men and women and people of all ages, from college students to retired people. Many have emergency or medical experience, but it's not necessary. Toronyi works in IT and there's even a beer salesman on the team. The most important factor is "the willingness to drop everything and respond."

An open house for anyone considering volunteering will be held on November 1. The two-hour meeting starts at 7:00 p.m. at the Kent County Sheriff's Department and a link to register is listed below.

Another fun way to find out more about KCSAR is to host a Missing Party. As part of the K9 team's practice each week, they will come to your house and search for your "missing" friends around the neighborhood.

"You supply the missing, we supply the dogs," says Toronyi.

Since KCSAR is not locally or federally funded, donations are always appreciated,

but they don't necessarily have to be in cash. Recently, Life EMS donated two ambulances, with one to be used as a communications truck and the other as a support truck. Before the ambulances could be used, they had to be painted and Maaco Collision Repair and Auto Painting donated \$5,000 in painting services.

The KCSAR team also helps with Kent County emergency communication and severe weather monitoring and notification when necessary.

"It's rewarding to help a person in need," Toronyi says. He adds that everyone on the team shares a caring and compassionate attitude and that's why they do what they do.

If you want to become a KCSAR volunteer, host a Missing Party, donate or find out more information, here are some links to get you started:

- Visit [Kent County Search and Rescue](#) online to learn more.
- Learn more about becoming a KCSAR volunteer at the [open house on November 1](#). Pre-registration is required.
- Host a [Missing Party](#).
- Make a [donation](#) to KCSAR.
- Like them on [Facebook](#).

Source: Brian Toronyi, Kent County Search and Rescue Deputy Director - Human Resources.

Writer: Heidi Stukkie

Photos provided by Kent County Search and Rescue.

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