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Search and rescue group trains just in case



ISAR Executive Director Mark Price gives a search team a scenario for a search to be used while training in Lowell on May 31, 2015.

(Jim Karczewski, Post-Tribune)

By **Michelle L. Quinn** Post-Tribune

Team trains, waits for call to help

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Illiana Search and Rescue Executive Director Mark Price looked at Team 1 and wondered aloud why Al Verduzco and Dan Krull were "stuck together like glue."

Working a search and rescue scenario during a training exercise Sunday morning in the tiny town of Creston, between Cedar Lake and Lowell, Price had presented the case: A family called the Lake County Sheriff's Department to do a wellness check on a man in his 60s, a hunter who's in decent shape. His vehicles are in the garage, and there appeared to be no forced entry into the house.

"OK, (Lake County Sheriff Cmdr. Guy) Mikulich would've called it in to us already. We've searched the house, and we know he's not inside," Price told the team. "What's next?"

Tony Macielak, a mechanic with BP Whiting Refinery, said the team would start a 360-degree search, whereby two teams would start from the last known point of where the man was seen – in this case, the house. The two teams would then step out 10 yards and search the perimeter for clues pointing in a direction where the man may have gone.

If they didn't find anything in the first 10-yard radius, they would then step out the next 10 yards and search counterclockwise to the direction they'd started.

"More times than not, people are found within a half-mile of their LKP (last known place)," Price said. "For example, if bad weather hits, we don't like to be uncomfortable, so we would find the nearest shelter. But we teach them to think if it feels glitchy, it probably is."

Which ultimately was what "the man" – a dressed-up skeleton the organization bought last year from a Halloween store – did. Krull and Verduzco found him in a shed, although Price was still concerned the two had not spread out enough to look for signs.

Verduzco, of St. John, however, had a plan all along. A member of the group since 2006, he'd recently returned from Camp Atterbury search and rescue training.

"They have a different perspective and use a grid search, which is kind of reverse to what we're doing today, and I'm still kind of in that mode," he said. "Even though we didn't come across the clues, we knew where to look."

Once a local Humvee rescue team, ISAR grew to serve an area encompassing Chicago to Kankakee, Ill., and from South Bend to West Lafayette, Price said. The group trains in four areas: ground search, vehicle team, medical rescue and canine search, of which two dogs – Remy, the trailing hound, and Izzy, the cadaver shepherd, were onsite Sunday. Members can train in whatever area they'd like, but they all must have ground search and rescue training.

ISAR is a group of certified men and women who volunteer to perform search and rescue missions when called upon, Price said. Certification comes from local to federal entities, and anyone is welcome to train.

The group trains once a quarter, and it takes a full year to be certified in a particular area, Price said. Once trained, though, they're called out on all manner of emergencies, such as downed aircraft and missing persons. ISAR, in fact, played a role examining debris in abandoned Gary house when the hunt was on for Carl Blount, the man who was charged in the shooting death of Gary Patrolman Jeff Westerfield in July, Price said.

Learn more:

Illiana Search and Rescue works with all municipalities to certify them in search and rescue maneuvers. Those interested should go to the group's Web site at illianasar.org or contact Mark Price at ISAR@earthlink.net.