



NORTH SHORE RESCUE

CHALLENGING THE ELEMENTS
AND SAVING LIVES

by Laurie Jones

photos courtesy NSR



■ Clockwise from above: Training evaluation conducted at Bone Creek Search and Rescue station; NSR is typically not covered to conduct search operations for dogs, to contribute visit northshorerescue.com; rappel training at Cypress Falls Park.

For residents and visitors in Metro Vancouver, North Shore Rescue (NSR) is one of the most high profile, critically important organizations in B.C. that saves countless lives on the rugged North Shore Mountains. A team of 50 community-based volunteers, both men and women, perform over 130 search and rescue operations annually on mountains, in canyons, and in urban settings.

“On average, we respond to three rescues per week, some lasting several days,” says Mike Danks, NSR team leader. “But in February 2018, on Family Day, we broke a record with eight calls in one day on the North Shore. Our team handled it well and I think that is, in part, due to the leadership of (the late) Tim Jones. He set our team up for success, but it’s really about the membership and their commitment level.”

Danks has been a part of NSR since 1996, following in his father’s footsteps. “My dad was a former team leader and training officer so he went through all the different roles,” he says. “The NSR has been a part of my life for as long as I can remember so it was a natural progression for me to join the team.”

Diversity in skills

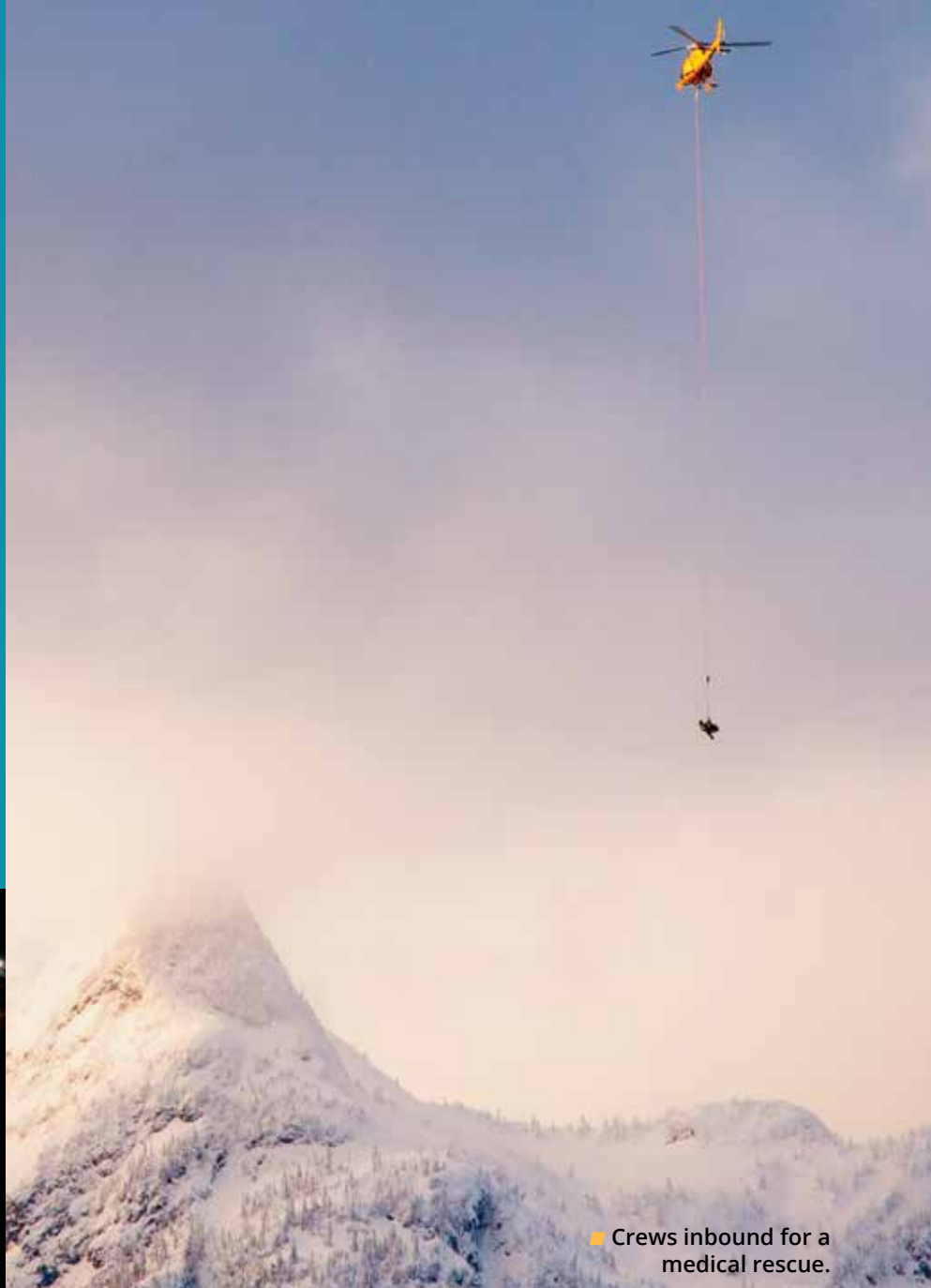
In addition to 40 active members, NSR has a group of 18 resource members. “Our professional volunteers include IT specialists, fundraising people,

snowmobilers, and our advanced medical provider (AMP) group that includes nine physicians and one ER nurse,” Danks explains. “It’s a very diverse group of that is made up of different backgrounds and different ages, both men and women.” The two-year training program to join the NSR team is rigorous, including a wilderness first aid course and many outdoor fitness requirements.



Danger arises quickly

Because the North Shore Mountains are in such close proximity to downtown Vancouver, people don't realize when they are hiking it can become very remote, very quickly. "People take a bus from downtown Vancouver to the base of Grouse Mountain, take the Skyride up to the top of the mountain, go for a 45-minute walk and suddenly find themselves at the back of Goat Mountain, in rugged, mountainous terrain," says Danks. "Hikers need to leave a detailed trip plan and let someone know where they're going and when they're expected back."



■ Crews inbound for a medical rescue.

To fee or not to fee, that is the question

The debate on charging for rescue services has been ongoing for years, but there are good examples for why it does not work. "We've had some notable calls that triggered monetary concern, including an individual who was snowboarding out of bounds on Cypress Mountain and ended up being lost for two nights and three days in a horrendous storm," says Danks. "On the third day we found him just

before dark. He was in rough shape and we had to strip off his wet clothes and re-clothe him in place. Because it was dark, we weren't able to fly with our helicopter so we had to call in the military to hoist him and our rescuers out. That became a well-known story and people were upset that the snowboarder's actions cost the taxpayers a lot of money. Cypress Mountain said they were going to fine him \$10,000, which created a tremendous amount of controversy."

Danks says as soon as the next day, they had a number of calls from lost hikers who delayed phoning for help. They had heard about the possible fine and didn't want to have to pay.

"That puts our rescuers in danger because people are going to try self-rescue, which often gets them further in danger," he says. "Potentially, they could injure or kill themselves. More often than not, they don't call until right before dark when they are in panic



■ NSR crew awaiting pick-up from a Talon helicopter.

mode and we have to dispatch our crews at night, sometimes in treacherous terrain."

Fundraising is absolutely essential to the not-for-profit operation. "Our annual budget is approximately \$500,000 to cover costs for equipment and facilities," Danks explains. "Grants are available to us, up to \$100,000, and we have tremendous support from three local municipalities which takes some of the pressure off. But we have to make up the rest through community donations."

In the last three years, call volume for the NSR has increased 30 percent. "This is making us look at how we respond to calls and making sure we have enough resources in reserve to continue helping people who are in trouble," says Danks. 🌲

Kayla Brolly – "I love being a part of the team"

For Kayla Brolly, being a member of North Shore Rescue is a fulfillment of her passion to help people and a love of the outdoors. "My first day with the NSR was July 28, 2013. I grew up on the North Shore and in addition to doing ski patrol, I did forest fire fighting with Rapattack (repelling from helicopters into fire zones) in Salmon Arm," she says. "Over the years I gained a lot of experience in emergency situations and I was also in nursing school. I had accumulated a number of skills that I wanted to keep using for the benefit of the community, and that fit well with the needs of the North Shore Rescue team."

Currently a full-time member of NSR, Brolly says they have four new women and two men in training. "The training standards are equal for all members and addition to aptitude and physical challenges, we have to be able to complete calls successfully."

■ Brolly and Danks assess and package a patient who was buried in an eight-foot-deep avalanche, for a long-line extraction off of the east side of Cypress mountain.

