

For the week starting

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50 cents



Sunny

Highs 80s/A2

SAR team achieves goals

By KATHY NUSSBERGER
Times Editor

PRIEST LAKE — Since its inception in 2001, the Priest Lake Search and Rescue (SAR) team has conducted numerous missions assisting in the rescue of lost, injured or deceased persons.

With 65 members, the team has 5-6 EMT's and a dog handler who lives in Spokane, but shows up whenever needed.

"We have about 40 members who live locally, but there are 15-20 who live in the Spokane area," said Mike Nielsen, co-founder of the organization. "A \$1,000 grant from the Idaho Community Foundation was recently awarded to help us purchase two more radios. We have 25 radios, but in a perfect world,

we'd like to have one for everyone. Another \$9,991 donation came from the Priest Lake Chamber of Commerce auction to buy avalanche bea-

Nielsen said beacons are a major factor in avalanche situations because if only a couple people have them, they are basically useless.



—COURTESY PHOTO

SAR team members participated the North Idaho Man Tracker training; (l to r) Staci Holmes, Vern Clemenson, SAR Team Leader Mike Nielsen prepare their notes.

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See SEARCH, A-3

Search

Continued from A-1

"When using beacons everyone needs one to receive and send the signal, or it does no good," explained Nielsen. "Whenever we enter an avalanche zone, there is always a secondary threat and we don't want to lose any member of our team."

The Sheriff's office provides some equipment for the SAR team, but most is purchased by the corporation through grants and donations.

"We have three vehicles, a couple pagers and a deal on the use of the sheriff's substation," Nielsen said.

The members range in age between 16-70 plus, and volunteers are always needed.

"We can accommodate almost anyone who wants to

volunteer," Nielsen explained. "Not everyone has to go on searches, we have positions in the command center for those physically unable or who don't want to work in the field."

The SAR's most recent rescues included the recovery of Marvin Dike who died while attempting to cross Granite Creek on his tractor in June, a missing 2-year-old girl who had wandered away from her home and was found approximately a mile away in May. A highly publicized rescue occurred in February when two avalanches occurred and where four people were buried, three were rescued and the fourth died.

"We exist to serve so others may live," Nielsen said. "Our goal is to raise funding and train people for search and rescue operations."

Over the last two years,

the District One and District Two Bonner County Sheriff's Emergency Services Unit has also participated in rescues in Clark Fork and assisted other agencies throughout West Bonner County.

"When we go operational, it is at the discretion of the Bonner County Sheriff," said Nielsen. "We do not self-initiate a search, we operate within specific guidelines and policies. However, on the private or business side of the organization, we are a non-profit private corporation."

The Priest Lake SAR was formed using a \$21,500 grant obtained by the Priest Lake Chamber of Commerce in July 2001 and became certified as operational in September 2001 by the Bonner County Sheriff's Office, after obtaining the training and equipment necessary to work independently

of any other SAR unit.

Prior to certification, the SAR team received training in GPS, map and compass, first aid and CPR, crime scene and evidence, marine boat operations, helicopter operations, winter wilderness survival, wilderness medicine, radio communication procedures, firearms, SAR management, swift water rescue and other topics.

The team is training to become a Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) in accordance with FEMA regulations; two members have obtained the 48-hour course to become instructors. This training will expand the team's role and capabilities to assist when first responder (fire, medical and law enforcement) resources are overwhelmed and or need additional support.