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'Humanity at its best'

Rescuers assist an injured hiker out of rugged Bobcat Canyon on June 12. The hiker could not make it out of the canyon on his own and with no helicopter available, a local ranch manager and his horses assisted getting the man out. (Courtesy photo/OPD)

Cowboy, cops, posse and EMS come together to aid downed hiker

By KATHARHYNN HEIDELBERG
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Jody Haskell was busy on his tractor at Roteman Ranch when the Olathe police chief called early Wednesday afternoon. A hiker was in trouble at the bottom of rugged Bobcat Trail, unable to continue in the heat due to a bad

ankle injury. No helicopter was available for extracting the man. Haskell didn't hesitate. He saddled up for what became a six-hour long rescue operation. "I know what it's like to be stranded out there hurt," Haskell said Friday, recounting how he provided two horses and expertise to authorities

and posse members to bring the injured man back to safety. Olathe police responded to the initial call for help, along with Olathe Fire Protection District. Olathe Police Chief Frank Rodriguez said

they met one of the hiker's friends at the top of the trail, who told them where the injured man and two others were. The fire department's emergency medical services assembled supplies and inserted into

"I made sure he kept talking to me all the way out so I knew he was OK."

~
Jody Haskell

the canyon to triage the patient and give him pain medication. Montrose County Sheriff's Office Sgt. Brandon King and several sheriff's posse members also joined the rescue, along with the Olathe fire chief, who was in charge of incident response.

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MCSO approves new contract agreement with staff

Employees see average salary and benefits increase of 12.6%

By JEREMY MORRISON
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The Montrose County School District has completed contract negotiations with staff ahead of the upcoming school year. The district reached an agreement with the Uncompahgre Valley Education Association that totals \$6 million and represents an overall average increase for staff salaries and benefits of 12.6%.

"It puts the district in a better position to recruit and retain the most highly qualified staff and also it's making good progress towards the goal of having the most competitive compensation and benefits package on the Western Slope," MCSO Finance Director Emily Imus told school board members last week.

See MCSO page A4

Montrose mounts up for park patrols

By KATHARHYNN HEIDELBERG
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Montrose boasts about 20 miles, cumulative, of trails in parks and along the river corridor. It's all wonderful for hikers and nature-lovers. But it's not so easy to patrol: vehi-

cles can't reach all of the remote spots; mountain bikes can't access all of the terrain, either, and on foot can be too slow for crime prevention and public safety.

At least, that is, for two-footed patrol. Enter the Montrose Police

Department's newest venture: horses. "We are trying to be innovative and find ways we can satisfy that community expectation while still maintaining police coverage in the city. It's difficult to have a police officer, even on a mountain bike, leave their

vehicle on a standard shift and get into some of the remote areas of parks and trails," Chief Blaine Hall told the Daily Press Friday, June 14, in announcing the department's Special Mounted Patrol Volunteer Program. The program will train and orient horse-riders, then

pair them with officers to enhance patrols in city parks and on city trails/trail areas.

The key components are in place, in the form of horses Kate and Carly, with their riders, Officer James Legler and Chantelle Bainbridge, the MPD's Victim Services coordinator and

facility dog handler. What the team needs are reliable volunteers who are willing to undergo the correct training and ride on scheduled patrols. Recruitment will soon open, and more details are to follow.

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Officer James Legler and Victim Services Coordinator Chantelle Bainbridge are leading the Montrose Police Department's newly formed Special Mounted Patrol Unit, which is seeking equestrian volunteers to help keep an eye on city parks and trails. Holding their horses near the bridles is Montrose Police Chief Blaine Hall. (Courtesy photo/Montrose Police Department)

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Olathe-area ranch manager Jody Haskell and his horses were integral to the rescue of an injured hiker June 12. (Courtesy photo/OPD)



Jody Haskell assists other rescuers in extracting an injured hiker from the bottom of rugged Bobcat Trail on June 12. (Courtesy photo/OPD)



A deputy, posse members, an Olathe Fire and Rescue Team member and others in the pause with an injured hiker on Bobcat Trail during extraction work June 12. (Courtesy photo/OPD)



First responders overlook the bottom of Bobcat Trail June 12, when an injured hiker needed help getting out. (Courtesy photo/OPD)

RESCUE

FROM PAGE A1

Rodriguez said he tried to get a chopper, but found they had been reserved for firefighting efforts elsewhere. So, he called Haskell.

"I said absolutely," Haskell said.

When Haskell arrived with two horses, they loaded up with supplies and he and Rodriguez made their way down the trail.

"It was so narrow, we could only get so far before we had to leave the horses," Rodriguez said.

"It's not a very user-friendly trail, but we rode within a quarter mile to where the guy was at," Haskell said.

"Then we had to pack him up a vertical hill about 100 feet to where we could get to my horses."

Once Haskell and others got the man on horseback, they had to stop twice and take him off because the trail wasn't stable enough to continue on horseback.

"I made sure he kept talking to me all the way out so I knew he was OK," Haskell said. "As a team, we all worked together to get the guy to where the horses were. There were six or eight of us."

The deep trail is "difficult in every way, shape and form," said Olathe Fire Chief Scott Fitzgerald, whose agency led the rescue. Fitzgerald went with posse members to the bottom of the canyon, while the MCSO relayed communications.

"It was 100% a team effort," said Fitzgerald, who praised Haskell in particular. "It (having horses) saved a lot and it was a lot easier on the patient than trying to extract him on a backboard. Jody was the hero of the day and Shiloh, the horse. In all my years of service, it was probably one of the most difficult extractions that I've been on."

Fitzgerald estimated the hiker was 1.1 miles from the trailhead, but about 1,000 feet down — and unable to walk out.

Searing heat approaching the 100-degree mark combined with rough terrain to challenge even the experienced rescuers — and the heat had also fatigued the hiker's three friends, Montrose

County Sheriff's Posse Director Mark Rackay said.

"We were running water and Gatorade back up and down the canyon. ... The heat was the real issue."

Posse members packed in extraction gear, owing to how steep the terrain was — Rackay likened stretches of it to "climbing a wall." Rodriguez said he and others set up mechanisms to drag the hiker to the horse.

"At this point, it was several hours. If it wasn't for that horse, it would be a lot worse. ... It was a team effort," he added.

The hiker and rescuers reached the top of the trail about six hours after the call for help came. Reports are the man is expected to fully recover from the reported ankle injury.

"It was really good work from all of the people," Fitzgerald said. "The interagency, all the stuff everyone does together, I'm very impressed with and I'm happy to work with the posse, police department and sheriff's office. Everyone had someone down there. ... It's really impressive to watch and see and be part of."

Rackay also praised the cooperative efforts. "It was truly a multi-agency effort that, six hours later, had a very happy ending," he said.

Rodriguez also thanked the efforts of WestCo Dispatch, along with the responding agencies, calling the operation "humanity at its best."

Fitzgerald reiterated the importance of the horses, while Rodriguez praised Haskell in particular. "He was the MVP, him and the horse. I can't overstate how important he was enough."

For Haskell, though, it was just the sort of thing he likes to do.

"I'm just an overall good guy. I kind of like to help everybody out if I can. Everyone's got to work together to keep this world turning," he said.

Katharhynn Heidelberg is the Montrose Daily Press assistant editor and senior writer. Follow her on Twitter, @kathMDP.

MOUNTIES

FROM PAGE A1

"It's going to be a wonderful program for Montrose. I'm actually really excited about it. I grew up riding, I grew up rodeo-ing," said Bainbridge on Friday, as she headed home from the mounted unit training session she and Legler attended in El Paso County. The sheriff's office there operates a similar program.

Bainbridge and Legler spent the week learning how to desensitize horses to the type of work they will be used to do and the scenarios they might encounter. "It was basically to teach the rider how to relax the horse. They kind of mimic our behavior. It was to relax the rider, so they (horses) also relax," Bainbridge said.

Bainbridge will be coordinating the mounted patrol program. She said she's looking for eager learners who are comfortable being in

the public eye and with patrolling — with an officer — for certain situations in parks and trail areas where a vehicle or bike cannot get in.

"That's where the horse is going to be beneficial. It's quicker on horse than on foot," Bainbridge said.

The Montrose program shouldn't be equated to something like the Royal Canadian Mounted Police — the volunteer participants are not sworn officers, will not have police powers, and will not be armed.

"We know that horses can get into areas that are difficult to access on foot or on mountain bikes," Hall said. "Citizens will be issued radios. They'll be trained. Their equines will be assessed to make sure they are appropriate for the program. They will be partnered with police officers to help patrol parks and trails."

As well, the program will be part of functions

and parades, as the horses are also intended as a means of public outreach. "Who doesn't love a horse?" Hall asked. "There will be a lot of benefits to this program. It respects the roots of Montrose, it respects the roots of our Western Colorado heritage. The benefits are having both police officers and citizens on horseback to get into brushy, wooded areas where people are conducting illegal activity; the civic engagement with (for example) kids in the park."

Hall learned about similar mounted patrol programs through a friend of his father. The friend was a volunteer with a mounted patrol program in Jackson, Wyoming. Hall ultimately sent his team to training in Colorado Springs, where the El Paso County Sheriff's Office has had a mounted unit in some iteration since 1996. The unit merged in 2017 with the EPCSO's

Rural Enforcement and Outreach Unit.

Hall reiterated that Montrose's is a citizen volunteer program — one he sees as a good way to perhaps counter the perception that the parks aren't always safe. He knows firsthand they see an amazing amount of use, even early in the morning and that, in addition to people who enjoy the parks and trails responsibly, there is a component that engages in illegal activity, prohibited camping, littering and vandalism. As well, there can be medical emergencies on trails or along the river corridor, as was the case in mid-May, when a man suffered a heart attack near the river, within the city of Montrose. Responders had difficulty locating and reaching the man until Sgt. Jonathan Roberts stumbled upon him and basically carried the patient to a bike trail and an ambulance.

"We can't always be

there. This is a way we can solicit citizen volunteers to help us increase our eyes and ears," the chief said of the Special Mounted Patrol Unit. "They will not have police powers. They will have a radio. They will have the ability to immediately report concerns, emergencies and public safety issues. It's just a really awesome, cool way to increase public relations, too."

The city's volunteer liability insurance would apply to civilian unit members; although Hall is eager to being the program, he said safety — for the public, the volunteers and the horses — comes first. Bainbridge said the program envisions scheduled patrols, because mobilizing horses and riders on-call would not be efficient. Montrose's mounted unit will draw on what established units elsewhere have developed. "We're not going to reinvent the wheel by

any means. ... We want to work with the public on it. It's a good tool to use to interact with our community. We're excited about it. We're going to make it successful," she said.

The Montrose Police Department will be spreading the word in coming weeks about how to apply to be a Special Mounted Patrol Unit volunteer. Keep an eye on the department's Facebook page and additional information the Daily Press will publish when it is provided.

"They are a reporting component only. I would look to them more as a citizen ambassador to the police department, but it is a citizens mounted patrol," Hall said.

"They'll be bona fide volunteers with the city of Montrose."

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