

Cal-ESAR: They've Got your Back(country)

By Cathy Dausman



Background: Ryan Riggins, Matt Riggins, Richard Weerts

Photo provided



skills I've learned helping people in real need. The teamwork is unbeatable and the program allows teens to work side by side with adults."

Parent Wes Riggins loves "being out in the field on actual searches." His training and work has taken him across Northern California, from San Francisco to Mendocino counties and many other places, including Yosemite National Park. Riggins says no two searches are alike, and the group has learned never to make assumptions. He cites a search earlier this year for an Alzheimer's patient who walked away from his care facility: "As the search progressed we got a call from the Los Angeles Police Department. Our subject, without money or a car, had managed to get himself to L.A. from Sonoma." Riggins serves in the program alongside his son Matt.

Richard Weerts is an Orinda resident of 23 years. He and his wife have three sons. An "avid outdoorsman," Weerts was a Boy Scout leader for 10 years. Weerts says joining Cal-ESAR was a way "to stay active outdoors [and] use the skills I have from years of experience for something more than recreation. The Orinda group...has all been friends of mine for many years." A licensed Amateur Radio operator, Weerts, call sign W3BTO, helps keep search communication lines open by bringing his own radio. Two other members of the interview group, Wes Riggins (K2WRS) and Travis Wiley (KJ6NZE) are also amateur radio operators.

Travis Wiley is an Eagle Scout from Troop 237 and a recent Whittier College graduate. Wiley joined the group in 2009. "Cal ESAR happened to be the only search and rescue team whose training schedule fit my college schedule." Because Wiley "wanted more action" he joined the Napa County search and rescue group as well. Wiley often provides transportation for the group, in the form of his crew cab Ford F-350 truck nicknamed "The General."

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Lamorinda's branch of California Explorer Search and Rescue (Cal-ESAR) is the nicest bunch of people you never want to meet—at least on the job. Cal-ESAR is a volunteer wilderness search and rescue team, and if they're looking for you—you're lost.

Chartered as Boy Scout Explorer Post 12, Cal-ESAR is a resource of the California Emergency Management Administration (Cal-EMA), and is open to anyone 15 or older.

Lamorinda Cal-ESAR are your neighbors and classmates; they share a love of outdoors, a healthy respect for nature, submit to emergency response training and are willing to drop everything to head out and lend their assistance on searches. They buy their own uniforms; furnish their own supplies and transportation. We recently caught up with six Cal-ESAR volunteers - three parents, one college grad and two teens, to learn more about the program.

Erin Grey, mother of three, is a Miramonte High and U.C. Berkeley grad. She works at REI and has guided trips for Sierra Club. The former assistant scoutmaster has facilitated emergency preparedness programs for Orinda's Sleepy Hollow neighborhood and at Orinda Intermediate School, and is Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) and Wilderness First Responder (WIFR) trained. Grey loves Cal-ESAR "because it allows me to use the



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