



## Rensselaer County Search and Rescue Inc.

### MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

Thank you for your interest in search and rescue and Rensselaer County Search and Rescue. Below is some general information about us, member requirements, and our search dogs.

**Q: What does Rensselaer County Search and Rescue do?**

**A:** Rensselaer County Search and Rescue (RCSAR) is a non-profit volunteer organization formed to assist law enforcement agencies in locating and recovering lost or missing persons. Our main resource is the Bloodhound along with several other types of search dogs. The organization maintains at least 20 active members, all of whom are on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week. They are self-sacrificing of their time and are highly trained men and woman, each specifically skilled in one or more of the following areas: Map/Compass, GPS/computerized mapping, communications, methodical searching, search dog handling, EMS (to the Paramedic Level), mountain rescue, rope rescue, man tracking, and Computer Assisted Search Management (CASIE) software.

**Q: I don't have any experience in search and rescue; can I still join?**

**A:** Yes. If you like being in the outdoors, helping people, teamwork, learning, challenges, commitment, land navigation, and dogs – RCSAR could be for you. A background in one or more of the following areas: the 'outdoors', wilderness survival, orienteering, high angle rescue or Emergency Medical Service; is helpful, but not a requirement.

The following positions are currently available - Field Team/Ground Support. We will prepare you for the search process and field work initially by instruction of communications/radio operations and methods of how to assist the ground team, both of which are vitally important to a search and rescue mission. A considerable amount of time and commitment is required to train for SAR. Here at RCSAR, we are professional volunteers, trained to the highest standards possible - someone's life depends on it!

**Q: OK, How do I join?**

**A:** RCSAR is seeking good, reliable members. To apply for team membership, one must be 18 years of age, in good physical condition, hold a valid New York State drivers license, and not be allergic to dogs. In order to maintain membership, participants must attend monthly meetings and drills as well as calls when and where needed. Prospective members should complete a membership application (available from our Membership Coordinator) if you wish to pursue membership. Then, candidates are required to attend three 'dog' drills before he/she is voted upon to become a probationary member.

**Q: When would I be called on to search?**

**A:** RCSAR does not respond to searches unless we are requested; usually by law enforcement. When officially dispatched; we always respond as quickly as possible. When we do respond, we work at a self-contained unit. This way, as Field Team members, you will be working with individuals you have trained with, developed a working relationship with, and trust. Search calls tend to happen in the worst weather, at night, and in difficult terrain. It is important that you respond with the appropriate outdoor clothing and equipment. Depending on what outdoor gear you may already own, costs for this may be extensive or perhaps very minimal. RCSAR provides the radios, maps, and other specialized rescue equipment necessary.

**Q: Now, what about the Search Dogs?...**

**A:** RCSAR is notably a canine(K-9) Search and Rescue unit. We have a proud history of producing quality search dogs and handlers. Our demonstration of expertise in K9 search and rescue has allowed us to work extensively in New York, Massachusetts and Vermont and for national agencies such as the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.

**Q: Does everyone have a dog?**

**A:** Having a search dog is not a requirement of membership. Having a search dog requires a significant commitment of time and money. It is a job that just isn't for everyone. When someone joins they are trained for field team/ground support first. These are vital positions that are always needed; and it gives you the chance to see what we do.

*(continued...)*



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### **Q: Can I use my dog for search and rescue?**

**A:** Typically, the answer is probably: no. A search dog is an animal that is selected for its temperament and a strong desire to work. All dogs have good noses, but not every dog has what it takes to perform at such a high level as search work requires. It has been our, as well as other teams, experience that the family pet will not be a suitable working search dog. In addition, it is impractical to start training a dog if it is older than two years; given that the time in which the dog is able to work will be limited.

### **Q: What types of dogs do you use?**

**A:** Our main tool for locating people are trailing dogs; specifically Bloodhounds. We also use tracking and air scenting dogs as well. Other than Bloodhounds; there is no specific breed that works better than another for searching; although dogs from the herding and sporting group lend themselves to this type of work more than others. We currently have 5 bloodhounds, a Rottweiler, a Labrador Retriever, and an Australian Shepherd.

### **Q: “I think that search and rescue would be fun to do with my dog, how do I go about that?”**

**A:** **SEARCH AND RESCUE IS NOT AN ACTIVITY THAT YOU “DO” WITH YOUR DOG.** There are numerous activities that you can participate in with your dog such as fly ball, rally obedience, agility, companion training, AKC tracking, therapy work just to name a few. SAR is a serious undertaking and requires a more abstemious consideration than these other non life and death consequential dog activities.

### **Q: Is it hard to be a search dog handler?**

**A:** It does require serious focus. It is demanding of your time, money, and mind. Handlers train their own dogs under the supervision of a senior handler. Training is a time-consuming commitment (taking about two years for certification). Handlers are compelled to take an active roll in their search dog education above and beyond what RCSAR provides in-house by reading textbooks, attending seminars and training opportunities outside of RCSAR, etc. Training very often takes you to other states to train with other experienced search dog trainers and organizations with which we are affiliated. Costs involved with training and maintaining a search dog may range from anywhere to \$1,000 to over \$3,000 dollars a year. It is essentially a part-time job to train a working search dog. It requires consistent training sessions approximately three times a week and sometimes weekends. The training of a search dog continues throughout their working life. Someone’s life depends on how well your dog is trained.

### **Q: “I am up for the challenge of being a search dog handler. How do I go about pursuing that?”**

**A:** First, RCSAR full member status and NEWSAR SAR Responder II certification are required before applying to the program. Acceptance into the search dog training program is solely at the discretion of the RCSAR search dog committee. We typically have a limited number of openings for search dogs. Team members who have previously trained and certified a dog with RCSAR are given the first chance to fill any vacancies.

For those that search, it can rightly be considered a calling with the rewards far outweighing all the sacrifices (family, time, money, sweat and sometimes tears) put into the training and deployment.

Thank you for considering search and rescue as a solemn pursuit. We look forward to meeting you.

*RCSAR Membership Committee*