



# SnowLine

The Official Newsletter of the

**TAHOE NORDIC SEARCH & RESCUE TEAM, INC.**

Lake Tahoe • Truckee • Donner Summit

**L**ast winter Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team needed some saving of its own. The Great Ski Race was approaching—a race with nearly 900 registered racers—and we had no one online to handle the race's computer registration and electronic race results output. Up to the plate stepped Team member Amy Home, who, with a high level of organizational and technological skill, spearheaded one of the race's largest (if not most complicated) tasks. Amy had help, of course, and to all we're grateful. But every job has a task-master, and Amy was it. So when Amy approaches you recruiting for this year's race, make sure to say yes.

During May of 1998, Amy was involved in an avalanche accident on the slopes of Oregon's Mt. Hood. One of her ropemates was killed in the slide and Amy was severely injured. At the next meeting of Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team—November 5—Amy will tell her tale of that fateful day and the lessons learned. As another winter presses upon the mountains of the American West, let Amy's story serve as a reminder to sharpen our weather-eye to the consequences of operating on steep, deep snow. Please attend the next Team meeting!

## October 12, 2001

At about 7:15 PM on October 12, Placer County dispatch paged Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team and requested our help with an injured climber. A 911 call had been made from the base of the Big Chief climbing crag reporting a climber with a serious head injury. The local fire departments had been dispatched shortly before and were in route.

After completing and descending their climb, two local climbers were gathering their gear and pulling down their rope. The pulled rope dislodged a bowling ball-sized rock from high up and it struck one of the climbers on the side of his head. It wasn't until 15 minutes into the Team callout that we learned the injured climber was Tahoe Nordic Search and

Rescue Team President Joe Pace. (Ironically, one of the five or six phone calls I had made in the previous minutes was to Joe's house: "Joe, it's Randall, it's 7:23, we have a callout, call me if you get in.")

I can tell you for certain that every Team member that was running to get their gear and get out the door turned that run into a sprint when they learned that it was Joe that was hurt. Doug Read said he hit 35 mph on his driveway; the Nordic Team truck made record time down the river road; even my rusty Toyota may have exceeded a speed limit or two across 267.

The backside of Big Chief (the rescue staging area) is accessed from The Great Ski

usual pretty self. There was blood all over him and most of surrounding area, his face was multi-colored, tending most toward the black and blue ends of the spectrum, his eyes were swollen and blood flowed out of one ear. Marc Stamm, Joe's housemate, workmate, and climbing partner, had blood all over his pants and no shirt on. He had used all his available clothing to quench the bleeding and to keep Joe as warm as possible from the already sharp, cold night air. The medics had a C-collar and oxygen mask on Joe, his head wound bandaged, and were closely monitoring his blood pressure, pulse, and level of consciousness. On "3" we moved J.P. onto a litter, and strapped him down tight for the hand-carried rollercoaster ride out of there.

The carry went (relatively) fast and smooth with at least 15 people managing the litter. At a couple steep parts of the climbers' trail we all made a human chain, passing Joe from one pair of hands to the next. Joe was conscious the entire way out, and answered (correctly) all the questions directed at him non-stop in an attempt to keep him conscious. By 10:20 PM, Joe had been ferried from us to a Truckee Fire Ambulance then to a nearby LZ and into a CalStar helicopter. He was flown immediately to Washoe Medical Center in Reno. October 12 was Joe's 44th birthday.

Without exaggeration I can say Joe Pace is one of the strongest guys I know. It seems every time I see him he looks thinner and stronger than the last. That extreme fitness came to his aid, I

think, in battling this severe injury. As of this writing (October 16) Joe has endured nearly three hours of brain surgery and a couple days in the ICU with every tube, wire, and conduit imaginable stuck, poked, and otherwise hard-wired into him. He is up, walking around, suffering a new haircut, and a couple days away from coming home from the hospital altogether. That kind of turn-around, from what can only be described as an extremely serious injury, attests to the physical and mental strength Joe possesses.



*Nordic Team members Dirk Schoonmaker and Joe Pace.  
Photograph by Randall Osterhuber*

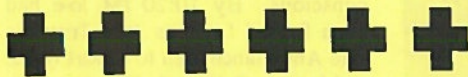
Race trail (the 06 road), and luckily that dirt road is graded fast and smooth, smooth enough to hit fourth gear in your truck, and in doing so leaving a dust plume that probably fogs the lens of LANDSAT. A number of Team members came skidding to a stop at pretty much the same time at the staging area; we geared up in about 60 seconds and started running down the trail toward the base of the crag about a mile away.

When we arrived, six firefighters were on-scene and had Joe just about strapped to a backboard. To be frank, Joe did not look his

There is much to be learned from all our search and rescues. Because Joe is such a good friend the lessons learned here (the obvious, of course: helmet!) are more acute and important than ever before. A quick response has always been one of the Team's mantras, and we've worked hard to improve our response time. But when it comes to a bad head injury, as long as we're prepared, we can't be too fast. The Team players really put it into overdrive when we learned it was our fearless leader's life on the line, but one can't help think we could move faster on all our rescues. If the person out there in trouble isn't a friend of yours, surely they are a friend of someone.

Marc undoubtedly saved Joe's life. By staying with him and checking the bleeding he kept Joe as stable as possible during a difficult time. In the first few minutes after the rockfall, Joe was in and out of consciousness. Marc's decisions and actions during this time were critical, and they paid off. At one point a helicopter dropped a sleeping bag and some supplies to Marc but they landed far down the slope, out of reach. Marc decided not to leave Joe, not even for the few minutes it would have taken to retrieve the goods.

In addition to Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team, rescuers from Truckee Fire, Northstar Fire, Squaw Valley Fire, Meeks Bay Fire, CalStar, and California Division of Forestry responded. Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team, and all of Joe's friends and family, are indebted to each of the firefighters and helicopter personnel, and grateful for their expertise and professionalism. Especially deserving of credit are the firefighter paramedics who (along with the Nordic Team's own Dirk Schoonmaker) demonstrated extraordinary skill and experience, giving Joe every chance possible. A tremendous thanks to you all!



## Team Trainings

Here's the list of Team trainings for November and beyond. Remember to sign up for a civil defense (OES) card and come to the trainings prepared—for sun, wind, or lake-effect snow! Depending on weather, some of the scheduled hikes may become ski tours. In any case, call the training organizer.

The Nordic Team garage is located at 223 Fairway Drive in Tahoe City, behind the Chevron Station.

**November 11:** A training in the Mt. Rose area with Russ Viehmann (582-1695). Meet at the Team garage at 8:00 AM or up at Tahoe Meadows at 8:45.

**November 14:** Jim Coffey (583-1276) will lead an avalanche transceiver practice at the Team garage, 6:00 PM.

**November 17:** Gerald Rockwell (583-5376) will conduct a computer training (the laptop on board the Team truck is loaded with the TOPO! software and can help the search coordinator keep track of searchers in the field) at the Team garage, 1:00 PM.

**November 18:** A training in the Castle Peak area with Steve Reynaud (587-4723). Meet at the Team garage at 7:30 AM or at Wild Cherries Coffee House in Truckee at 8:00.

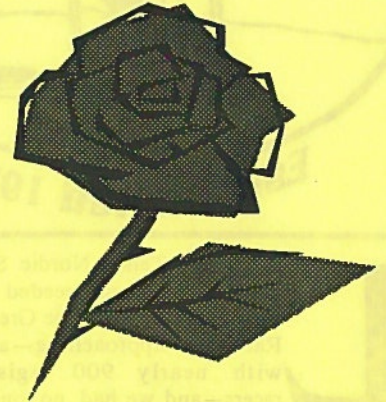
**December 1:** Peter Sporleder (546-0588) will lead an all-day hike from Incline Lake to Martis Peak. Meet at the Team garage at 7:30 AM.

## Milestone

Sad news, I'm afraid. Long-time Alpine Meadows ski patrolman and Truckee resident Andre Benier died of colon cancer on October 8. He was 46 years old.

Though Andre was never a full time member of Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team, many Team members knew him well. Andre was a key player in many of our searches that originated at Alpine Meadows. He helped the Team skiers orient themselves to the terrain, weather, and snow stability at the commencement of many stormy search

nights. Often he was still at the ski area long into the night having arrived at the mountain the previous morning for pre-dawn avalanche control. He patrolled at Alpine Meadows for 18 winters. Andre is survived in Truckee by his wife Mary Ellen, son Stefan, and many friends.



## Team Officers

President	Joe Pace	583-1806
Vice President	Steve Twomey	525-7280
Treasurer	Scott Schroepfer	546-2809
Secretary	Terri Viehmann	582-1695
Board Members	Karen Honeywell	546-8609
	Ray O'Brien	581-4358
	Randy Sharp	587-2877
	Russ Viehmann	582-1695
	Randall Osterhuber	546-4491
Directors-at-large	Douglas Read	583-6381
	Gerald Rockwell	583-5376

## Committee Chairs

Cuisine	Debra Schroepfer	546-2809
Dispatch	Jackie Thomas	587-2687
Education	Karen Honeywell	546-8609
Equipment	Russ Viehmann	582-1695
Great Ski Race™	Douglas Read	583-6381
	Randall Osterhuber	546-4491
Newsletter	Randall Osterhuber	546-4491
	Scoop Remenih	583-1684
Snowcats	Ray O'Brien	581-4358
	Paul Honeywell	546-8609
Training	Bernie Mellor	546-2238

All phone numbers area code (530).

GET HISTORICAL MOM/MO

## Tahoe Nordic Search & Rescue Team, Inc.

Post Office Box 7703  
Tahoe City, California 96145

(530) 581-4038

[www.tahoenordicsar.com](http://www.tahoenordicsar.com)

Non-Profit  
Organization  
US Postage  
PAID  
Permit #135  
Truckee, CA  
96160

MARK JOHNSON  
PO BOX 8258  
TAHOE CITY CA 96145

please keep us informed of your correct address!