

THOUSAND ISLANDS GROUND SEARCH AND RESCUE

Your Best Way out in Time of Need

By Lorraine Payette

You're out in the bush, and suddenly you don't know where you are. Do you know what to do, where to go, or how to help get yourself rescued? Do you have everything you need to stay alive and safe for 24-hours?

"Hug-a-Tree and Survive' (HAT) started as an RCMP search and rescue initiative helping lost people survive in the woods," said Catherine Gill. "This proactive, preventative program originated in San Diego, CA, after Jimmy Beveridge, a nine-year-old boy, became lost and tragically died in the wilderness."

Part of Adventure Smart, HAT has expanded under the National Search and Rescue Secretariat (NSS) and Search and Rescue Volunteer Association Canada (SARVAC). The rules apply to anyone traveling in the woods.

"Always let someone responsible know where you are going, be sure to carry some kind of emergency shelter and whistle on all outdoor trips, and find a good tree to 'hug' and stay near as soon as you discover you are lost," said Gill. "This is extremely important

– if you continue to wander around, it only makes it harder for the rescue team to find you and uses up your precious energy and resources. All outdoor enthusiasts should carry a simple day pack containing an emergency blanket, a bottle of water, some high energy food (such as trail mix and/or a granola bar), a good whistle, and glow-sticks to make themselves more visible after dark. As well, every household should have an emergency kit allowing them to survive for 24-72 hours in case of disaster."

Although Gill, a founding member of the Thousand Islands Ground Search and Rescue (TIGSAR) team, has a canine assistant, she reminds everyone that the dog is simply a tool, part of the equipment used to bring missing people back to their homes and loved ones. The most important members of the search and rescue teams are the volunteers.

TIGSAR is an all-volunteer non-profit registered charity consisting of more than 20 highly trained, dedicated people operating under the Ontario Search and Rescue Volunteer Association (OSARVA), the Governing body for Volunteer Search and Rescue teams within the Province of Ontario. Members pay an annual membership fee of \$50 plus \$50 for the basic searcher course. They buy their own equipment, and are expected to attend and pass, at least 60% of the ten training sessions held each year. Training exercises include winter wilderness survival, basic searcher courses, urban search



Trouble can come at any time of year, and TIGSAR volunteers are ready to help; Catherine Gill and her dog, Alex, doing a presentation at Linklater Public School

and rescue, search patterns, canoe training, ATV training, survival training and wilderness survival. They must recertify annually, keeping up all of their skills and equipment at their own expense.

"The OPP have been tasked with search and rescue in Ontario, so we respond to their call," said Gill. "We come, and we bring trained bodies – searchers to walk a grid line, people who know what to do. It's our respect and appreciation for the trained professionals in our community that leads to becoming a respected search and rescue team."

TIGSAR has assisted in searches in several nearby communities, and is available to perform demonstrations and/or speak for schools and interested organizations. They receive no government funding and raise money entirely through donations from individuals and groups, with every dollar going into improving equipment and training. Their dream is to be able to purchase and maintain a complete rolling command post containing all necessary emergency equipment and a "normalizing centre" where victims can sit, catch their breath, have a beverage and reorient themselves before going on to the next stage of recovery. **LH**

To learn more about emergency preparedness, go to <https://www.adventuresmart.ca/>. For more about TIGSAR programs and services, how to join or to contribute in any way, please contact them at tigsar@live.ca or go to www.tigsar.ca.