

# Winona County Dive/Rescue Team

## Information Sheet

The Winona County Dive Rescue Team is one of three volunteer components of the Winona County Sheriff's Department. The other two organizations are the Search Operations Assistance and Rescue (SOAR) Team (formerly referred to as the Posse) and the Mounted Posse.

The Dive Rescue Team had its roots in the Winona County Underwater Recovery Team. Over time it was discovered that a specialized group was needed to handle some of the unique situations found in Winona County and the surrounding area. In response to this need, the Dive/Rescue Team was created and has been operating in its current form for over thirty years.

### Qualifications for Membership

At a minimum there are six basic requirements to be considered for membership on the team:

- Candidates must have a valid driver's license
- All candidates must be over eighteen years old
- They should be able to pass a police background check
- They should be in good physical condition
- They should live close enough to respond promptly to call-outs
- They should not be associated with another emergency entity

Upon completion of an application, the police background check will be made. If that comes back clean, an interview with the sheriff will be arranged. Pending the outcome of that interview, the candidate will interview with the team's membership committee. The membership committee will make its recommendation to the team leader and the team will make the final decision on membership.

Candidates should understand that the process describe above is not intended to be unnecessarily exclusive or elitist. We are, however, looking for members that will be dedicated to our mission and who will be good team players.

## Probationary Period

The first six months on the team will be a probationary period.

During this period a minimum of four (4) meetings are required. After the six month period, the member shall be reviewed by the team leader and membership committee and recommendation shall be made as to full membership.

During the six (6) month probationary period, the new member shall be allowed at all calls, but will not be allowed to dive at a callout

If the new member, within this timeframe, does not meet the requirements of the team, said member may be terminated by the Team Leader, membership committee, or quorum of team members.

## Duties

The Dive Rescue Team is on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week, all year long. We may be called out in the middle of a winter's night or on a sunny summer afternoon. We respond primarily to emergencies involving the river or other bodies of water and to high angle extrications from the many bluffs we have in the area.

As an example, in the past we have been called out for vehicles that rolled into the river, were called for two individuals who broke through the ice on the river, rescued some canoeists who had capsized, were involved with a search for a man who has been missing since December 2005, spent eleven days looking for a family of four who drowned at the Dresbach Dam, helped in the victim recovery of a suicide on the river, and searched for a missing college student and helped recover his body from Garvin Heights, just to name a few. Other call-outs that are typical of our team would be to assist boaters who are in trouble, looking for lost and missing hunters and fishermen, or any other emergency where bodies of water or bluffs are concerned. In short, we work for the Sheriff and do what he asks us to do.

It is common in law enforcement for agencies to render mutual aid. In the past the team has been sent to help with flooding victims in the Fargo-Moorhead area, drag for a drowning victim near Menomonie, WI and assist with the cave extrication in northern Iowa.

Applicants should be aware that there are some inherent risks and dangers associated with this job. We are expected to wear a pager during our waking hours and have it by our bedside while we sleep. We are expected to respond in all kinds of weather conditions. Some of our call-outs are non-emergencies; others are true emergencies. While responding to an emergency situation we are expected to act with due care for the public and our team mates. Our team vehicle is equipped with lights and a siren but we are not authorized to exceed the speed limit or break any other laws with either the van or our personal vehicles.

When it is possible for you to respond, you should. Acceptance of membership on the team is a pledge to your fellow team members and to the Sheriff that you will help when you can and not only when it is convenient for you. **We are looking for individuals who are absolutely committed to the team and its mission.**

## Training

The team has eleven monthly training sessions and a December annual meeting with the sheriff. Usually the training is developed around one of the many kinds of activities we would be involved with. In their first year on the team, it would not be uncommon for a newcomer to be a diver, (if certified) or help a diver, operate a boat during a dragging exercise, rappel from a cliff, help package a victim on a backboard and use a GPS all in the context of training. The variety of assignments we are given is quite wide and when our pagers go off we never know what we might end up having to do. Constant training, both with the team as a group and individually, puts us in a better situation to respond to these situations.

## Mandatory Attendance at Training Sessions

Training sessions exist for two reasons. One, of course, is to learn and hone the skills necessary to carry out our duties. A second, and less obvious reason, is to get to know your fellow team members and understand their strengths and weaknesses.

In order to accomplish these two goals, it is very important to note that attendance at most training sessions is mandatory for continued membership on the team. We realize that there will be times when, for various reasons, a member will have a scheduling conflict and will not be able to attend a training session. To accommodate situations like this, the team has established the following policy - **A team member is not allowed to miss more than five training sessions in a rolling two month period.** This means that, looking backward from any given date, a member must not have missed more than five training sessions in the past twelve months. Failure to meet this requirement means the team member will be asked to speak with the team lead to determine if this member should continue on the Team. Occasionally a team member will have some family, military, or medical issues that have to be addressed and the person may be granted a leave of absence from the team until things are straightened out.

## Valuable Skills to Have

Because of the wide range of environments we are called upon to perform in, many skills are needed on the team. Foremost among these are scuba diving and knowledge of the river and boat operation.

Scuba diving is one of the most valued skills on the team. While many of our call-outs do not require a diver, scuba diving remains one of the most important skills the team has. It is also, without a doubt, the most dangerous activity the team is involved with. Diving in the Mississippi with its low visibility and currents presents problems and dangers most scuba divers aren't familiar with.

Boat operation and knowledge of the Mississippi River is another skill that is valuable to the team. Most of our call-outs involve the river and those who have spent time on the river and understand its ways are particularly useful to the team. Fishermen and hunters who have spent time in the backwaters as well as in the channel would be good candidates.

The team can also use the skills of those who are somewhat familiar with rappelling and rock climbing. When someone is injured in the bluffs, it is not uncommon for us to rappel to the victim, secure them on a backboard and into a stokes basket, and get them to safety one way or another. Those who have these skills would be a real asset to the team.

Other skills valuable to the team would include emergency medical training. A majority of the team members are amateur radio operators. Many have military experience.

It is not required that you necessarily possess any of the skills mentioned above as a prerequisite for application for membership on the team. First and foremost we are looking for individuals who have a sincere desire to help their fellow man and serve Winona County. On the other hand, those with some of the skills mentioned above are particularly valuable to us.

## Equipment

The county provides the team with building and a variety of equipment. The "Van Building", as we call it, is located in the old Winona Monument building. Primarily it houses our van (an older ambulance), the SOAR van, and our boat; all of which are county property. The county also provides the diving equipment needed for the team, rappelling equipment, two-way radios, emergency medical equipment, some specialty cold weather clothing, and various other odds and ends.

Our team colors are yellow and black. When we are at the scene of a call-out, there is no mistaking who we are. Since each team member isn't known to every deputy, police officer, or fire fighter we may encounter on a call-out, it is helpful to have some sort of identifying uniform that makes our members stand out. Not long after a new member joins the team they are

expected to have available to them certain, minimum team clothing. The minimum would include a team issued t-shirt, long sleeve t-shirt, and a sweatshirt. Most members have a variety of other clothing including winter jackets and fleece pullovers.

## General

It is important to consider that we are a fairly close knit team. Most of the team members have been working with each other for many years. We understand each other's strong and weak points and try to help each other out. It takes time to get to know the other team members names, learn the procedures for doing things and to get to feel comfortable in new surroundings. We understand this.

The Winona County Dive Rescue Team is a valuable resource to the community. No other organization is available to take on the wide variety of assignments that we do. The work is sometimes unpleasant. It seems we are always being called-out or train on the hottest days in the summers or the coldest days in the winter. Like any emergency service, we are sometimes drawn away from our homes and families at inconvenient times only to have the call cancelled. It is occasionally heartbreaking work when we recover a victim from the water or a hillside and deliver them to the coroner while a grieving family stands by. Most of the time, however, the work is satisfying and rewarding knowing that we are Winona County's first choice for search and rescue.

## Conclusion

If, after reading this, you have any questions, please feel free to contact any member of the Dive/Rescue Team. If this looks like the kind of volunteer work you would be interested in, we encourage you to complete the application included with this packet. If you meet the other requirements, pass the background check, and are still interested in joining the team, an interview with the team's membership committee will be arranged. Thank you for your interest and the time you took to read this.

**WINONA COUNTY SHERIFF'S DIVE/RESCUE TEAM  
MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION**

TODAY'S DATE    /    /

NAME (LAST, FIRST, MIDDLE): \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

CITY: \_\_\_\_\_ STATE: \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_

EMPLOYER: \_\_\_\_\_

BUSINESS ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

HOME PHONE: \_\_\_\_\_ WORK PHONE: \_\_\_\_\_

CELL PHONE: \_\_\_\_\_ EMAIL ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

DL NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_ STATE: \_\_\_\_\_ SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_

HEIGHT: \_\_\_\_\_ WEIGHT: \_\_\_\_\_ HAIR: \_\_\_\_\_ EYES: \_\_\_\_\_

NEXT OF KIN (NAME, ADDRESS, PHONE, RELATIONSHIP): \_\_\_\_\_

I understand that any appointment will be contingent upon the results of a thorough character investigation and I am aware that any false statement or deliberate omission made on this questionnaire will cause my name to be removed from the eligible list or to be cause for immediate dismissal if an appointment was made.

SIGNED: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE:    /    /

**REFERANCE CHECK**

NAME	PHONE	DATE	BY
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1: \_\_\_\_\_

2: \_\_\_\_\_

3: \_\_\_\_\_

**DEPARTMENT USE ONLY**

NCIC CHECK: \_\_\_\_\_

LEC CHECK: \_\_\_\_\_

DRIVERS LICENSE CHECK: \_\_\_\_\_

RECOMMENDATION: \_\_\_\_\_

SHERIFF'S APPROVAL: \_\_\_\_\_

**WINONA COUNTY SHERIFF'S DIVE/RESCUE TEAM  
SPECIAL SKILLS**

**MEDICAL:**

CPR CERTIFIED:

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ADVANCED 1<sup>ST</sup> AID CERTIFIED:

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FIRST RESPONDER:

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EMT:

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PARAMEDIC:

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MD:

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OTHER (PLEASE LIST):

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**SCUBA DIVING (LIST CERTIFICATION DATE AND AGENCY):**

OPEN WATER:

ADVANCED OPEN WATER:

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RESCUE DIVER:

DIVE MASTER:

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MASTER DIVER:

SCUBA INSTRUCTOR:

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SPECIALTY RATINGS (LIST ALL):

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OTHER (PLEASE LIST):

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**CLIMBING/RAPPELLING:**

LEVEL OF TRAINING:

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OTHER (PLEASE LIST):

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**OTHER SKILLS THAT YOU POSSES WHICH WOULD BE AN ASSET TO THIS TEAMN:**

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