

Retired carrier makes a rescue on horseback

A lifelong hobby has turned into a life-saving one for **Elisabeth Goodwin**, a member of the East Texas Mounted Search and Rescue (ETMSAR) group.

Goodwin, a Houston Branch 283 member and director of retirees for the Texas State Association, retired in December 2008 after carrying mail for 23 years. Shortly after, she received a horse named Twister for her birthday.

“I’ve had a love for horses my whole life,” she said.



Goodwin and her husband, former Region 10 National Business Agent Gene Goodwin, were preparing to go on vacation in 2011 and took their horses to be boarded. The man who was watching their animals was a member of ETMSAR, and he told the couple about the volunteer group’s efforts to find local missing people. The group had formed just the year before.

The couple was intrigued—and soon joined.

ETMSAR, whose motto is “We ride so others might live,” has about 25 members.

Among the advantages that mounted searchers have over those on foot are that horses give members a higher viewpoint, and that searchers can go farther than on foot. Horses also have a greater sense of smell and sight than humans. And, while volunteers on foot walk in a line two to three feet apart, mounted riders can be 10 to 12 feet apart, covering just as much visually over a wider area.

Though life-threatening situations don’t often arise (there have been only three during Goodwin’s tenure), ETMSAR members are always prepared.

That means practicing one or two times a month on horseback and in the classroom. Participants work on their protocols, communications and technology; have regular CPR and first-aid training; and practice using compasses and GPS to find people. Then they, along with other organizations, join for large-scale simulations twice a year. The exercises allow everyone to practice teamwork in advance of a real-life situation.

“We can’t go fast. We have to travel slowly, so you don’t miss a clue,” Goodwin said.

Members must be certified to ride their specific horse during actual or simulated search-and-rescue exercises, to ensure that everything goes according to plan.



Elisabeth Goodwin and her horse Durango in 2016

Goodwin lost Twister in 2016. After mourning her trusty horse, she eventually got a new one named Durango. “He’s been a really good horse,” she said. “We’re bonding. He trusts me and I trust him.”

Goodwin says that her experience as a letter carrier has helped immensely in successful search-and-rescue missions. “As a letter carrier, you are observant” and have excellent map skills, she said.

“One of the most important skills as a letter carrier is your memory,” Goodwin added. So, when out looking for a missing person, it’s easier to tell if some little thing seems off.

All of these factors come together when East Texas Mounted Search



Above: Goodwin (in yellow/green) and the other members of Team Zulu, who helped locate Frank Roth

Below: Goodwin and Roth after he returned home from the hospital

and Rescue is called, usually by the sheriff's office, to join in the hunt for a missing person. When the call comes in, the group uses a phone tree to spread the word.

The first time Goodwin took part in a search was in 2012, for a lost woman. They did find her, but the woman was dead. "We had to be careful to not contaminate the crime scene," she said.

The next time was a short hunt for an Alzheimer's patient, whom they found safe.

And the most recent episode, in November, involved searching for a lost man named Frank. The 70-year-old had been out for a walk with his dog, Sunshine. He has Parkinson's disease and takes medication several times a day.

That Friday night, ETMSAR got the call. They mobilized early the next morning.

"We all met at the highway," Goodwin said. "We caravanned with our horses. People said, 'The cavalry has arrived.'"

They quickly split into two groups and started looking for Frank. Soon, she said, "We found his sweatshirt," That was a sign that they were headed in the right direction, so her group radioed to the other group to join them.

Goodwin began calling Frank's name over and over and eventually heard a noise that sounded like it might be from his dog. When she called the man's name again, he responded, "Yeah."

"Keep answering me so I know where you are," she called out to him.

When they found the man—along with Sunshine, who had stayed with her owner—he was disoriented and dehydrated. He had walked for 12 hours straight before stopping.

"We found him alive in less than one hour," she said. They radioed their find in to their ground support.

Goodwin kept him calm until medical personnel could reach him. "I didn't want shock to set in," she said.

A medevac helicopter soon touched down to transport Frank to the hospital, where he spent a few days. He and his family thanked ETMSAR and the other groups that had joined in the search, for having "all worked together to bring our family the best possible outcome."

Goodwin was just happy she could help. "It was humbling," she said. "We were thankful."

Training and searching keep the group busy, but that's not all ETMSAR does. Members also do a food col-

lection for the local pantry, and hold seminars for local youngsters to teach them what to do if they ever get lost.

Members pride themselves on being an integral part of the greater Houston area. "We want to be known as the group who helps the community," Goodwin said. "It is humbling and fulfilling that you can give back to the community."

For more information about East Texas Mounted Search and Rescue, visit etmsar.org. **PR**

