

A salute to local

RESCUE WORKERS



Thirty years on call

LaPete makes service a part of the family

By HANNAH LAGAABRAM

NEW HAVEN — The end of July marked 31 years as a rescue squad volunteer for Lisa LaPete, the Head of Service for New Haven First Response.

“I really take pride in being an EMT (Emergency Medical Technician) and serving to give back to community,” she said.

LaPete, 55, served for more than 20 years in Milton, where she grew up and where her brother worked as a fire chief.

She got a hint of how intense the work was right off the bat.

One of her first calls was a former classmate who had gotten in a car wreck and had the steering wheel stuck in his chest.

“I was holding head stabilization on him, and we were joking about school, something about the lockers... As soon as they got the steering wheel out, I just felt the heat leave his face,” she said.

“Either this is going to do me in or this is going to make me stronger later,” she thought at the time. And though it was far

from an easy experience, LaPete said she thinks it has made her stronger.

“I’m really good on scene,” LaPete said, adding that fellow squad members and patients alike appreciate her ability to keep cool and calm.

LaPete is trained as an Advanced-EMT, which means she is capable of administering certain medication to patients onsite and before they get to the hospital. Often, LaPete’s medicine is all patients need.

“They call me the 10-93 queen,” she said, laughing. Those numbers denote the dial tone for “no transport is needed.”

Part of that ability comes from experience.

After putting in two decades with the Milton rescue squad, where LaPete said she and her shift partner were so practiced at working together they didn’t even have to speak, LaPete started volunteering with the Vergennes Area Rescue Squad 11 years ago. She started serving on the New Haven squad when she moved there seven years ago.

Last year, LaPete clocked in 3,200 volunteer hours with the squads, on top of working a full-time job at UVM Medical Center, where she has worked for nearly 30 years. That was nothing compared to previous years when LaPete was averaging 4,000-5,000 hours.

“I just love patient care,” LaPete said.

And it’s in her blood.

Several of LaPete’s extended family members work with Milton Rescue and Milton Fire, and her sister did Emergency Medical Service (EMS) work in Grand Isle before she passed away. LaPete’s two daughters still work with her closely.

“They were into it because I was into it,” LaPete said of her daughters. When they were little, the kids would accompany her to meetings and trainings, and often be around on shift nights.

“It was our second family,” LaPete said. But the habit — and the skills — stuck.

“Both girls could do better inventory on the trucks than most of the crew members by the time they were 10,” she said. Her

(See LaPete, Page 2)



LISA LAPETE, A leader of New Haven First Response, has spent a lifetime in service to people in times of need. Her younger daughter, Haley, top, and older daughter, Nikki, above, also serve on the New Haven rescue squad.

LaPete

(Continued from Page 1)

daughters started as full squad members at ages 14 and 16.

Her eldest, Nikki-Lyn Sickles, now 29, is a member of the Vergennes squad and married to Vergennes firefighter Steven Sickles.

Haley Lauziere is 25 and works as a first responder in New Haven.

Every other Sunday, the family has dinner at LaPete's house and almost always rescue work is part of the discussion.

"We talk about it all the time ... I'm so proud of them," Lisa said.

For all of them, giving back to the community is the central piece of what makes EMS so important, LaPete said.

"It's about giving gratitude to your community," she said.

FEWER YOUNG PEOPLE

But while every shift night used to feel like "family night," with ice cream to eat and card games to play, LaPete said that for the most part the younger generation doesn't have the same passion and commitment, and it affects the squad vibe.

Far fewer young people — or people at all for that matter — are willing to volunteer their time. So squads have started to allocate their meager funds to pay new members to come on. But this isn't necessarily a win, according to LaPete.

"It's because we're desperate ... but

often these people come from outside of the community, they don't know the roads ... it's a job to them," she said.

For LaPete, there's something meaningful in not being paid.

"I work so hard ... it's rewarding and I don't expect a dollar back," she said.

But she does wish it could be different.

"If they were able to pay everyone equally it would make a big difference," she said.

For the time being, "I wish I could give these young folks half the passion that I have," she said.

That passion has endured through years and years of witnessing, touching and talking to people in painful, sometimes life-threatening situations.

"I just love patient care."

— Lisa LaPete, New Haven First Response

"Some of the shit you just can't make it up ... it's devastating sometimes," LaPete said.

She works through the "heart wrenching" moments by destressing and debriefing with her crew, as well as occasionally seeing a counselor if she feels like she needs it.

"It's important to me that my crew is OK," she said. And she does her best to make sure that they are. "I feel like I've brought so much to EMS, especially with my girls," LaPete said.

After 30 years, people do tell her this kind of work has a shelf life.

LaPete's response: "I never gave it up and I probably never will."

"It's true that the adrenaline isn't there like it used to be, but when that tone goes off, I just have to go," she said.



ABOVE, LISA LAPETE'S daughter Haley Lauziere and son-in-law, Steven Sickles, contribute their efforts at a fire scene. Steven is a member of the Vergennes Fire Department, his wife and LaPete's older daughter, Nikki-Lynn Sickles, is a member of New Haven First Response, as is Haley. Right, LaPete provides EMS coverage at the Champlain Valley Fair, where she has helped out for eight years.



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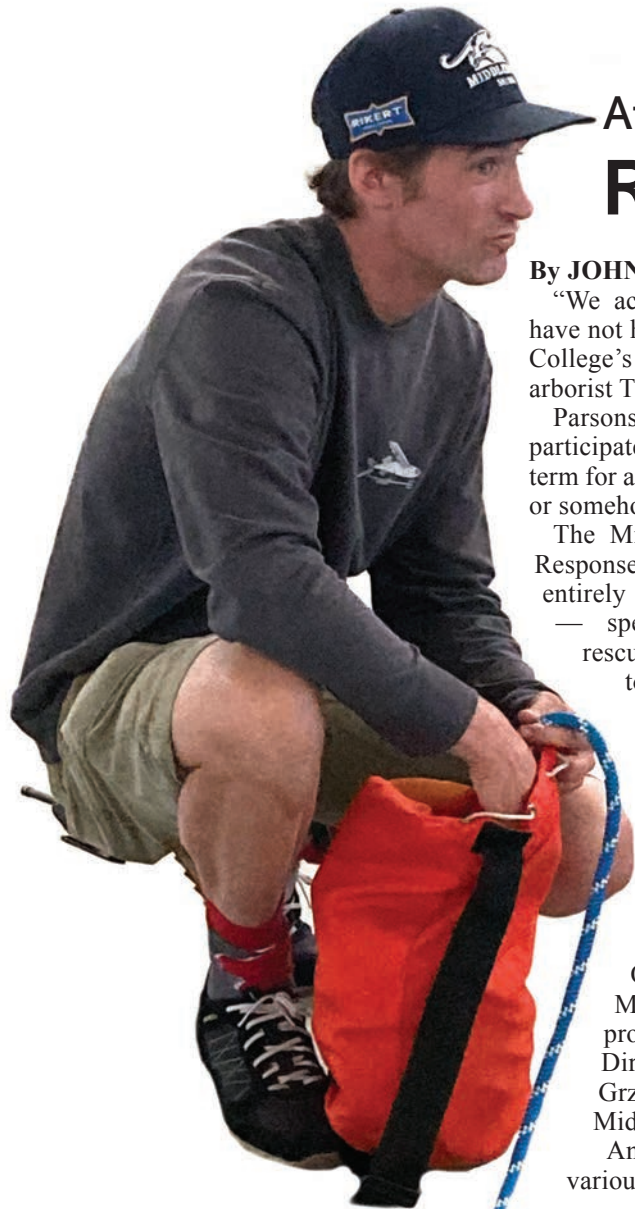
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At Middlebury College Regular staff ready to help in a pinch

By JOHN VAALER

“We actually — knock on wood — have not had to do one yet,” Middlebury College’s landscape horticulturalist and arborist Tim Parsons said.

Parsons is referring to not having yet participated in a confined-space rescue, a term for a rescue in a place that is narrow or somehow tricky to approach.

The Middlebury College Emergency Response Team — which is composed entirely of Middlebury College staff — specializes in confined space rescues, which are primarily meant to assist college employees in fields where work in confined spaces sometimes occurs, such as plumbing or heating, ventilation and air-conditioning work.

The response team’s leader, Rick Christofferson, is the college’s Emergency Management Coordinator.

Other members include Middlebury College theater program Associate Technical Director Jim Dougherty and Sean Grzyb, Ski Patrol director at the Middlebury College Snow Bowl.

And although the team trains for various types of calls that occur on

the college’s campus, confined-space rescues are the team’s specialty.

Parsons listed several potential confined spaces at the college: the Peterson Family Athletic Center’s swimming pool, for instance, as well as manholes and other potentially dicey areas around campus.

“If you have to get a patient out of these spaces ... there’s specialized tools, techniques and equipment that we train (with) to be able to perform that kind of rescue,” he said.

But even if Parsons can’t recall the last time the squad has performed a confined-space rescue, he noted that the training sessions are certainly not in vain.

“You prepare for (a rescue) like this, but if facility services (are) doing the job properly, we shouldn’t have to do a rescue,” Parsons said. “We are ready and on-call if we do.”

Dougherty agreed, noting that the scarcity of confined-space rescue missions actually make the squad’s monthly training sessions even more important because there haven’t been any recent opportunities to undergo such missions.

“You have to train because you don’t want to be using your calls as a training opportunity,” Dougherty said. “Over the course of the year we’ll be training on not just technical rescue but accountability, keeping track of people on scenes.”

The group meets each month on Wednesdays at training sessions that

take place at different areas around the college’s campus. A training session the *Independent* visited this summer took place at Middlebury College’s Peterson Athletic Center.

During the session, the team took an inventory of ropes and climbing devices and practiced how they’d use this equipment in the event of a rescue.

CLIMBING UP OR DOWN

Grzyb talked about which types of rescue work various practice equipment is helpful for.

“We were doing a review of rigging skill (at the training session),” Grzyb said. “So (the equipment is) for falling, ascending and descending. If somebody is stuck in a confined space and you have to pull them out, or if they’re injured in a really high space like a rafter from a ceiling, that’s how we’d lower them from the rafter. Basically, rescuing

people that are not accessible without climbing up or down.”

The squad’s monthly meetings paused during the first year of the COVID pandemic, but last April the team resumed regular training and has been meeting on campus.

Christofferson — who took over the response team’s command in November 2018 — said he was glad that since April these training sessions have been back in action, noting how important the team’s presence is because of how dangerous

(Continued on Page 14)

“You have to train because you don’t want to be using your calls as a training opportunity. Over the course of the year we’ll be training on not just technical rescue but accountability, keeping track of people on scenes.”

— Jim Dougherty, associate technical director, theater program



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DURING A RECENT training session at Nelson Arena, Middlebury College Emergency Response Team members Scott Barker, left, and Tim Parsons organize some of the specialized tools they use to rescue people trapped in confined spaces, like heating and ventilation ducts.

Independent photo/John Vaaler



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Brandon Area Rescue Squad

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Perfect Couple

NIKKI-LYN SICKLES, Lisa LaPete's older daughter, and Steve Sickles pose for an engagement photo with Steve's Vergennes Fire Department turnout gear and Nikki-Lyn's Vergennes Area Rescue Squad sweatshirt.

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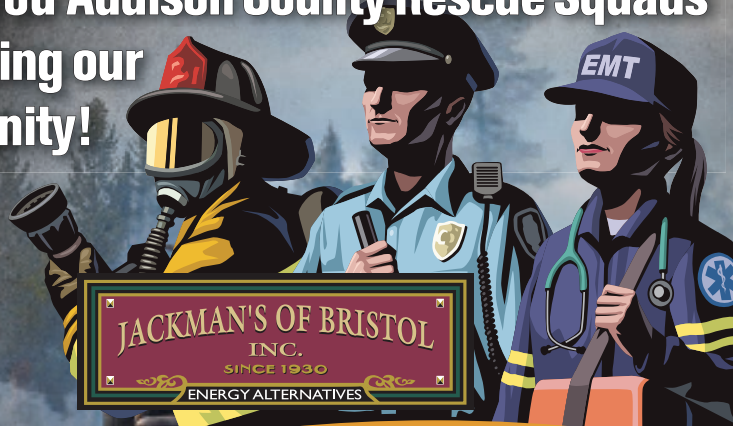
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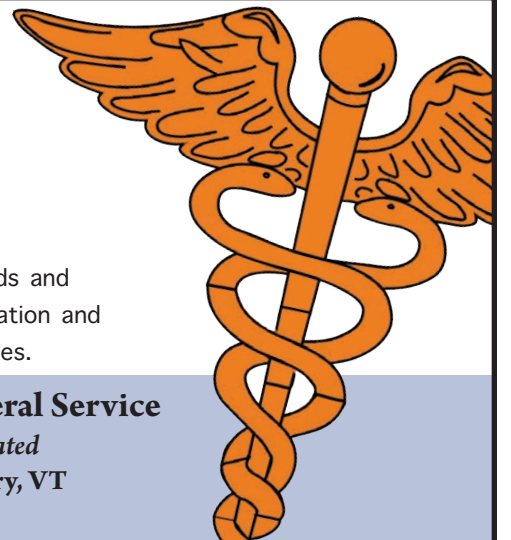
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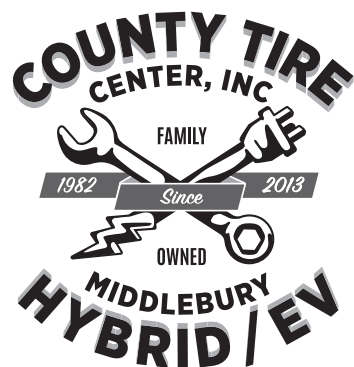
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(Continued from Page 3)
confined-space rescues can become.

“Basically, a lot of folks who are well intentioned finds themselves in harm’s way,” Christofferson said. “Some folks operate under the assumption that people get in trouble because they are not really savvy. It’s not the case. The circumstances can become overwhelming: natural, man-made.

“(During) confined-space rescue, a person might be overwhelmed by toxic fumes. If you aren’t able to get in there and provide assistance, there’s a strong possibility that person might expire.”

DOUBLE LIVES

Parsons noted that many of the skills he’s acquired in caring for the college’s trees are germane to his rescue work.

“As an arborist, I try and plan for and mitigate those risks. That is extremely similar to what we do on the ERT team because we are always planning for the worst-case scenario. It helps open your eyes by mitigating or engineering your way out of these risks.”

—Tim Parsons,
college landscape
horticulturalist

“As arborist I try to manage risk because some trees as they age start to go into decline and can become risk trees,” Parsons said. “(These trees could) fall on cars, fall on buildings, fall across the sidewalks.

“As an arborist, I try and plan for and mitigate those risks. That is extremely similar to what we do on the ERT team because we are always planning for the worst-case scenario. It helps open your eyes by mitigating or engineering your way out of these risks.”

Dougherty, in the theater department, observed that many of the skills he’s developed while helping Middlebury students put on shows have been helpful to him when training for confined-space rescues.

“Working with theater means you’re

working with ropes and knots,” he said. “The precautions are different, but the skills carry over. Theater can be a very high-pressure, time sensitive work environment that transfers to working on an emergency scene. You have to communicate to work with your teammates.

“There’s a lot of parallels,” he added.

Dougherty also noted that working on the Middlebury College Emergency Response Team has helped refine his communication skills.

He also found that his work preparing for confined-space rescue has assisted him with his technical direction of Middlebury College plays, too.

“You might learn a technique that helps you work with ropes that works with a piece of scenery,” Dougherty said. “Some of the organizational and accountability services can help with structuring a team for a theatrical event. Who’s responding to whom and reporting to whom, what alleys and levels of communication.”



JIM DOUGHERTY, RIGHT, technical director of the college Theater Department, talks about training techniques with other members of the Middlebury College Emergency Response Team in Nelson Arena. Other team members are, from left, Tim Parson (college horticulturalist), Sean Grzyb (ski patrol director) and Ed DeMatties (carpenter).

Independent photo/John Vaaler



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