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Dramatic Helicopter Rescue in the Lafayette Hills

By Nick Marnell



A Rescue tech descends from STARR 3 to an injured hiker in Briones Regional Park. Photo courtesy of the Contra Costa County Sheriff Office

The Contra Costa County Sheriff's Office air patrol assisted the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District in saving the life of a hiker who collapsed on the Lafayette Ridge Trail in Briones Regional Park last month, the result of a joint effort recently undertaken by the two public safety agencies.

It was also the first helicopter rescue for ConFire Captain-Paramedic Matt dePolo.

"The hiker was with a group on a long walk on a very hot day, one of the first hot days of the season, said dePolo, who was on duty with the helicopter crew that day. "He got sick, and dizzy, and collapsed. One of the hikers called 911."

The dispatchers requested the STARR 3 helicopter, which is parked at Buchanan Field in Concord: A hiker was down, at an unknown location in Lafayette. Dispatch sent the exact GPS coordinates as the helicopter took off.

"We flew directly there," dePolo said. "I'm in the back with a search and rescue technician, the pilot and the tactical flight officer in the front. We flew along the trail, 40 to 50 people on the ground pointing us in the right direction. The guy was down, under a bush, about three miles up the trail."

DePolo and the rescue tech dropped from the copter to the patient, who was unconscious, with no pulse, and determined to be in critical condition. DePolo administered advanced life support and the patient was delivered by air to the ConFire crew at the trailhead in 11 minutes.

"A land rescue would have taken 45 minutes to an hour, and the patient may not have made it," dePolo said. ConFire transported the patient to Kaiser Medical Center Walnut Creek, and he survived.

"You train for this, and when you're called, you don't really think about it. It's time to get to work," said dePolo, C-Shift captain at Lafayette station 17.

"Firefighters don't get to do this every day, but we love doing it,"

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[back](#)

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