Angels of the outback

Climbing accident victim, Andy Campbell, 23, of Seattle, is assisted by Dr. Mark Shipman and Stewart Hoover of Chelan County Mountain Rescue approaches its 50th year. "He started a whole different paradigm by delivering medical aid to the victim, rather than collect an injured victim and deliver him or her to medical care. We brought the ambulace to the patient. That defi nes us," said Fager modestly. Fager, now 90, moved to Washington in the early 1960s and began climbing in the Columbia Basin, as well as other areas. "I was a doctor who did it all," he said.

Chelan County Mountain Rescue celebrates 50 years of saving lives

BY RICK STEGMAYER

WENATCHEE — Some people will go to any length to help someone they know needs help. And then there’s Chelan County Mountain Rescue, a group of avid outdoor enthusiasts willing to drop whatever they’re doing and brave through forests, scale sheer cliffs anddig through avalanche debris to save the life of another.

An Chelan County Mountain Rescue approaches its 50th year — no one seems to recall exactly what year in the early 1960s the unofficial group was formed — early members say they’re optimistic that the group will continue to stage rescues — and fortunate body retrievals — in places few people are skilled or willing to go.

“For the reason our group has been successful is that it’s made up of a bunch of guys — many of them medical — who want to spend every free minute hanging on a rope,” said Shawn Ballard, co-owner of Ballard Ambulance, a paramedic and longtime member of the group.

That has made the group uniquely quali ed for mountain rescue, but very diffi cult to organize, said Ballard during a training session Aug. 30 at the Peshastin Pinnacles State Park.

Hundred of rescues behind them, the group is still unfamiliar with any state or national mountain rescue organization. And that’s the way these maverick climbers like it.

Most of their funding for equipment comes from their own donations or from other private groups. All the same, the group has an inspirational model for many other volunteer rescue groups around the country.

“From our earliest days with Dr. Don Fager, this outfit has been different,” said Curt Haire, co-owner of Ballard Ambulance, a paramedic and longtime member of the group.

Mountain Rescue volunteer for 30 years. “He started a whole different paradigm by delivering medical aid to the victim, rather than collect an injured victim and deliver him or her to medical care. We brought the ambulance to the patient. That defi nes us,” said Fager modestly. Fager, now 90, moved to Washington in the early 1960s and began climbing in the Columbia Basin, as well as other areas. "I was a doctor who did it all," he said.

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