

Impact 100 grant saving lives

Before we won the 2016 Impact 100 Grant, we had struggled for a long time with a boat that had reached a ripe old age of about 40 years. Quite often, I've used my own personal boat due to our "rough weather" vessel being in the shop.

This was the case when we responded to the helicopter crash in the ICW, just east of Navarre. Sadly, this aircraft incident took the lives of 11 service men who were training that night.

We arrived at the water's edge before daylight and the fog was so thick the roads weren't even safe. We launched four vessels, all equipped with side Image sonar, thanks to Impact 100.

Two of the boats were our Rescue One boats, which we purchased with grant money from the 2012 Impact grant. These vessels were the most shallow draft vessels involved in the search and allowed our members to search the shoreline as well as the shallow water very effectively and very efficiently.

Over the course of that search, we collected hundreds of pounds of aircraft debris and as much human remains.

Had it not been for the boats and sonar we had at our disposal, our effectiveness would have been greatly compromised, and effective recovery would have taken much longer.

After winning our grant in 2016, we purchased our 23-foot Whaler, which was built for the Navy for the purpose of search and rescue.

We spent the next three months cleaning, painting and outfitting her and within two weeks of completion, were called out on a search by the Coast Guard for a vessel in distress. The call came in about 10 p.m. on a Monday night. There were thunderstorms and wind was 25-30 mph out of the northwest.

As we pulled out of East River and into East Bay, we ran into four-foot white caps. Fortunately, the wind was slacking slightly and it was only 50 degrees. By the time we joined the FWC vessel on scene, the storms had eased. Sometime before midnight the Coast Guard vessel had departed and shortly after, both FWC crews pulled out.

We were in the middle of a Coast Guard assigned task so we offered to stay on scene and complete our assignment. Around 1:30 a.m., the Coast Guard Helo arrived and we continued search patterns as long as they were on scene so they would have surface support in case they spotted something. Our search technique included use

of radar, FLIR thermal imaging video, and spotlight, all tools afforded us by Impact 100.

In the long run, no persons or debris were spotted and we all arrived at the assumption that the call was in error or it was a hoax.

You never know, when they call you have to go!

We have received funding from Impact 100 grants that have bought us many great pieces of equipment and technological advances. Each one makes us more effective, and each time we get a little quicker, safer, more effective, the subject has a little better chance of survival, and our members have a safer working environment.

As we study lost person behavior, we have learned that a normal healthy adult has a 72-hour window of survival, but on the extreme opposite end is the 24-hour survival window of those with Alzheimer's, Down's syndrome, or Autism. Every minute counts.

I hope the ladies of Impact 100 know they are an important part of our team. No one can do this job alone. Together we can do this work better and do more of it. Rest assured, you have saved lives! *BJ Dunson is Marine Operations commander with Escambia Search And Rescue.*



BJ Dunson

GUEST VIEWPOINT

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