



Snow angel

December 1, 2016

Several winters ago, Bill Purtymun and his fellow ski patrollers responded to a cry for help off in the trees while they were at the top of [Pajarito Mountain](#). With a toboggan behind him, Purtymun skied downslope toward the cries. “We first thought the gentleman had skied into a tree,” Purtymun says. “It turned out he had suffered a severe injury, and we had to cut a tree to get him out of the woods. He was taken off the mountain by toboggan and then airlifted from the ski area parking lot to the regional trauma center in Albuquerque.” Although Purtymun was the first on the scene, he notes the rescue effort involved many patrollers and even bystanders. “It’s a team effort. It really is,” he says.

An emergency planning hazard analyst with the Laboratory’s Planning and Analysis group, Purtymun is also assistant ski patrol director at Pajarito Mountain, where he brings 35 years of experience as a nationally registered Emergency Medical Technician Paramedic (EMT-P). Fortunately, ski and bike patrollers at Pajarito Mountain typically deal with less serious ailments, such as altitude sickness, a tweaked knee, or a dislocated shoulder, rather than a serious accident requiring an airlift.

At left, Purtymun samples the fresh powder at the Patrollers Education Conference in Snowbird, Utah. Right, Purtymun hauls a toboggan as a ski patroller at Ski Santa Fe in 1985.

Work worth doing

In any case, Purtymun says, “there’s gratification in working hard at work worth doing.” Sometimes the gratification has an external source: For his efforts during this rescue, Purtymun was awarded the National Ski Patrol’s Purple Merit Star, which honors a patroller for saving a human life through emergency care and the use of ski patrol skills.

In the summer months, Purtymun volunteers as a mountain bike patroller during lift-served bike and hike days at Pajarito Mountain. Mountain bike injuries typically don’t require the same kind of help from the patrollers as skiing injuries do. “Mountain bikers are usually wearing protective body armor, and they self-evacuate,” Purtymun says. “During a severe rain and lightning storm, we did bring a guy who was pretty heavily concussed off the mountain in a truck.”

An early introduction to service

Purtymun learned to ski at [Santa Fe Ski Area](#) at age six “on the Poma lifts that dragged you up the hill in your soaking wet Levi's,” and he participated in the Santa Fe public school program, but he didn't ski consistently through his teens.

By the age of 16, he was a volunteer with mountain search and rescue, at 18 he was a nationally registered EMT and firefighter, and by 20 he was a paramedic. When he wasn't fighting fires or responding in ambulances, Purtymun worked for the Santa Fe Ski Patrol.

Giving back

“I feel like I'm giving back to some of the younger folks, and I like watching them grow and succeed,” Purtymun explains. “I had really great mentors through the Explorer Scouts and Search and Rescue, and a lot of folks put time in for me as a young adult.”

The Pajarito Mountain ski and bike patrols are staffed primarily by volunteers, about 80 percent of whom are Lab employees, Purtymun says. “The work we do is always a team effort. The ski and bike patrols are a lot of fun, and the people involved are wonderful. It's like a family—they've got your back, and you've got theirs.”

[Read a longer version of this profile here.](#)

Purtymun's father was a geohydrologist at the Lab for 22 years. Celedon Aragon, right, explains automatic beta counters to the Purtymun family at Los Alamos National Laboratory Family Day in 1973. From left, Bill senior, Elizabeth, Ann, Bill, and Kevin.

Los Alamos National Laboratory

www.lanl.gov

(505) 667-7000

Los Alamos, NM

Managed by Triad National Security, LLC for the U.S Department of Energy's NNSA

