

Making a Difference in the Lives of Others

The BMF Project for Search and Rescue was established to honor the memory of Brandon Michael Fugate, who at the age of 18, drowned in Lake Ray Hubbard. Brandon and two friends had gone out on the lake to check a trout line. An expected front blew in, the wind gusted to over 40 miles an hour, and the boat capsized. The three were thrown into the 42 degree water with no life jackets. First they thought it was best to wait with the overturned boat, but after a short time in the cold water Brandon felt he should go for help and swam for shore. Later a fisherman rescued the two boys by the boat, but could not find Brandon.

A rescue team was quickly dispatched, but conditions were extremely difficult. The search was to last 29 days, but the team never gave up. There were many delays, including having to wait for equipment to come from other parts of the state. During the time spent with rescue workers, Brandon's family discovered that funding to buy equipment was a major problem regardless of the agency. Game wardens, divers, and other volunteers often had to buy much needed items with their own money, such as cold water suits and specialized search equipment.

Donald Fugate, Brandon's father, vowed that the excruciating wait his family had gone through to find his son, would not happen to anyone else. He founded the BMF Project to raise funds, provide resources, and help search and rescue groups acquire the necessary technology, equipment, and training needed to effectively perform their jobs. The project also promotes safe boating, water safety education, and lends support for families who go through the trauma of searching for a loved one. Since its inception 6 years ago BMF has raised a substantial amount by hosting a variety events and getting the financial support of local businesses and individuals. With these funds the project has been able to purchase and donate to area teams several pieces of badly needed equipment. On their website (www.thebmfproject.org) is information on upcoming events, how to make a donation or submit a request for equipment or services for your team. A recent request came from the North Texas Special Response Team for an underwater metal detector; an essential piece of equipment used by law enforcement agencies and public safety dive teams worldwide to locate weapons and evidence used in the commission of a crime. BMF acquired a JW Fishers Pulse 8X and presented it to team members at the offices of Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission.

Another tragic event that ended with something good coming of it, was the Christmas day suicide of a man who jumped into the icy waters of the Tennessee River with his eight month old baby in his arms. Members of Knoxville's all volunteer rescue squad were at the scene in less than 30 minutes, but despite an exhaustive search involving agencies from across the state, it took more than a month to locate the baby's body. Rescue workers came to know Kristie Brown, mother of the baby, and other family members as they were always on site during the long, arduous search operation doing whatever they could to help. The family heard first hand about the difficult and dangerous conditions as divers groped along the bottom in near zero visibility. Team members of the Knoxville Emergency Rescue Squad explained the technology existed to perform this type of search operation, but the team didn't have the money to buy it. So Kristie took it upon herself to raise the money necessary to buy a side scan sonar, so no other mother would to endure what she went through; the wait to find a loved one. In less than one year she raised over \$25,000 which was enough for the team to purchase a new JW Fishers SSS-100K/600K dual frequency side scan system.

A few of the many other groups that have donated equipment to local teams are; United Fund of LaGrange County in Indiana bought a Pulse 8X for the LaGrange County Sheriffs Dept, Southeastern Regional Planning and Economic Development Council purchased Fishers TOV-1 towed video system for the South Eastern

Massachusetts Law Enforcement Council, Search and Rescue Society of British Columbia offers equipment and resources to 80 SAR groups in Canada and provides Fishers Pulse 12 boat-towed metal detector and DV-1 drop camera, Region 7 Homeland Security Planning Board shares a Fishers Pulse 6X metal detector with several counties in Michigan, and volunteer rescue squads and dive teams from around the country have received private donations to buy JW Fishers underwater metal detectors, video systems, ROVs, and side scan sonars.

For more information on JW Fishers complete line of underwater search equipment go to www.jwfishers.com.

Photo attached: Members of North Texas Special Response Team with their new JW Fishers Pulse 8X metal detector and BMF Project founder Donald Fugate.

