



LARISSA LUCCLAIR (3)

By Mary Catherine O'Connor

# Working like dogs

WHEN IT COMES TO SAVING LIVES,  
SKI RESORTS ARE CALLING ON  
MAN'S BEST FRIEND FOR HELP.

Each turn of the shovel denies me more light. Finally, complete, utter blackness overtakes me, as I lie on my back, perfectly still, under 6 feet of snow. All radio communication has stopped; the only sound is my breathing. I'm starting to get cold. Are they still up there on the surface? Did they forget about me? Does this

Smart, agile and compact, golden retrievers are one of the most popular breeds for snow rescues (left); since he was a puppy, Kino (above) has been training to respond to emergencies.

BOB WINSETT/INDEXSTOCK

# Working like dogs

darn radio even work? I don't know if I could even get to the surface on my own. There's a lot of snow up there. I imagine I could do it, if I really needed to—but certainly not if I had a broken femur, or if I had gashed my head on the edge of my snowboard while being rag-dolled by a tumbling mass of snow. It's dark—I can't see my hand in front of my face. Wait. I hear something. Oh no, it stopped. Okay, I don't know if I...wait, there it is again. The sound of digging paws. It must be Kino. He found me!

Welcome to Avalanche Search

Dogs 101. For Kino, who trains every winter day and does this exercise at least once a week, today's drill is just another part of his workload. In the event of a real emergency, he'll work with the same level head, searching the avalanche site in turns and twists that, though they may look erratic, are both thorough and comprehensive. In fact, Kino and dogs like him are the most effective tool ski patrols have in searching for victims buried in an avalanche within ski area boundaries.

A 4-year veteran of the Taos Ski Valley's ski patrol in New Mexico, Kino is a stoic 5-year-old golden retriever whose demeanor changes from serious to really serious when he's searching. Kino is trained to find human scent and dig (and dig, and dig) to its source. It could mean the difference between life and death for the buried skier or

Step by step, from the bottom of a slope at Taos Ski Valley, Kino demonstrates a flawless rescue.

snowboarder, but Kino just innately loves searching—he hunts the slope with his tail wagging.

For his efforts, Kino receives lots of praise from his owner and trainer, Bob Willette, and from the other members of the ski patrol. The ski area also rewards him by paying for his food and healthcare. But what he gives back to his owner, the other patrollers, even to me—a pretend victim who sees him at work for just one day—is priceless. A strong emotional bond forms between these avalanche dogs and their handlers. "After four and a half years together, Kino is like my son," Willette says.

Patti Burnett, a ski patroller and dog handler at Copper Mountain ski area in Colorado, under-

# Incorporate.

*It's 10:00 a.m. Wednesday.  
And I'm right where I want to be.*

*Your family. Your work. Both are important. Incorporate your company.  
It lets you take care of your business and family...at the same time.*

Incorporate with The Company Corporation and you may enjoy:

- substantial tax breaks
- maximum protection of personal assets
- attract investors, and much more.

### Save up to 90%

Incorporate with The Company Corporation and you'll save big. You won't pay the costly \$2,000 to \$3,000 in professional fees. Or, spend hours completing paperwork. Or wait for weeks before you're incorporated. We can incorporate your business:

- easily...directly from your office.
- affordably...for as little as \$45, plus state fees.
- quickly...in 8 minutes.

### Count on Our 99 Years of Experience

Since 1899 we've been in business, and incorporating companies is all we do. We incorporate everybody, in any

state. We can set you up as a Delaware corporation, the choice of corporate America.

### Incorporate Over the Phone in 8 Minutes

We can incorporate you over the phone as long as you have your credit card handy. You never have to leave your office. And it only takes about 8 minutes.

### Get Your FREE Booklet

Get a FREE copy of "The Business Incorporating Guide." A guidebook that gives facts, answers questions and tells you how to form your own corporation.

### Protect Your Family...Your Future

Call now and we can incorporate you immediately or we'll reserve your corporation's name for 30 days. Take your next step toward greater financial freedom. Incorporate!

### The Company Corporation

The Company Corporation is an incorporation service company and does not offer legal or financial advice.



Call us for  
**FREE Internet Domain  
Name Registration:**  
.com, .net, or .org.

Call  
**1-800-637-4898**

Incorporate online  
[www.incorporate.com](http://www.incorporate.com)



LARISSA LeCLAIR (7)



stands this human-canine bond. In 1986, Burnett trained Summit County's first avalanche rescue dog, a golden retriever named Hasty. By the end of his career, Hasty had completed 107 rescues (both at the ski area and for a Colorado search-and-rescue team). After retiring, the golden retriever even helped Burnett train her next dog, teaching the eager pup through example. "I always knew that whatever I asked of Hasty, he would do it with all of his heart," Burnett says.

Dogs like Hasty and Kino are not alone. Canines have been used for rescues in snowy alpine environments since the early 17th century, when Saint Bernards helped find visitors lost on their way to the hospices of St. Bernard of Menthon in the Swiss Alps. No one knows for sure when the idea first took hold in the United States, but Alpine

Meadows ski area near Tahoe City, California, and Watsatch Powderbird Guides, a heli-ski operation based near Salt Lake City, both had formal avalanche rescue dog programs in place by 1976. Since then, many resorts in avalanche-prone areas throughout the West—in California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, New Mexico, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Washington and Wyoming—have come to rely on these canines.

Rescue dogs need to be strong, agile and relatively small; they must be able to load onto a moving chairlift and dig into tight spaces in the avalanche debris. In other words, Saint Bernards no longer fit the snow-rescue-dog job description. Purebred German shepherds were widely used throughout the late '70s and early '80s, but hip problems and a bad public image, due to their use

as police dogs, caused ski areas to phase them out. Today, golden and Labrador retrievers are the most popular breeds for snow rescues, because of compactness, agility and sociability, as well as their long snouts. (The longer the snout, the stronger and more precise the dog's ability to smell.)

"We start the selection process when the dogs are just puppies," says Mark Watson, a 13-year veteran of Utah's Snowbird ski patrol and the head of its dog program. This process involves simply watching the canine's behavior, even that of puppies as young as 8 weeks. "We test the dog's social drives, and its prey and hunt drives," Watson says. This might include isolating the dog in an empty room and having a stranger walk in. If the dog quickly runs over to greet the unknown visitor, it has strong inherent social attraction—an impor-

**COLORADO**  
**SKI VACATIONS**

**Best Lodging Deals in Winter Park!**

- Discounted Airfare
- 18 Other Resorts

**800-575-4686**  
[www.vacationsinc.com](http://www.vacationsinc.com)

**VACATIONS INC**  
Your Complete Reservation Service



dog alerts differently. Some stop so fast it almost looks like they're running into a wall. Others alert by barking."

In our drill at Taos, Keir Green, a member of the ski patrol, was buried about 80 feet across the slope from me. We were both given radios so that we could communicate with each other and with the rescue crew. We also wore avalanche transceivers—just in case. Once we were completely buried, the stopwatch started and radio communication stopped (although either of us could have used the radios if we needed help). The next step: waiting. The dogs and their handlers stayed at the bottom of the slope (about 100 yards away) for 10 minutes before giving the dogs search commands. By then, our scent had enough time to percolate to the top of the dry, light New Mexico snowpack.

Moqui, the other dog involved in the drill, alerted on Green in just a few minutes. Sixteen minutes after the last shovel of snow was placed on me, Kino found my scent and began digging. The patrollers joined in with their shovels, and I was out in no time—and nearly blinded by the bright sunshine.

Using the avalanche transceiver as a guide, a well-trained and experienced patroller might have found me in about the same amount of time—but it's not likely. Also, transceivers offer patrollers limited usefulness in ski areas, where the vast majority of skiers and snowboarders are not wearing these safety devices.

Since their U.S. introduction, these ski patrol search dogs have helped save the lives of at least four people, including a woman who was buried for two days beneath the rubble of a building that was struck by an avalanche at Alpine Meadows ski area.

Having witnessed these dogs at work, I'm a believer in the power of the canine nose, which is up to 1,000 times more sensitive than a human's. Unlike Canada, the U.S. lacks a nationwide governing body to oversee avalanche rescue dogs and their accreditation, something many handlers hope will change in the coming years.

If it happens, these canines might just start their own labor union. Even though humans are capable of 360-degree mute grabs and backflips off 50-foot cliffs, ski patrol dogs are the ones who really rule the slopes, paws down.



OMNI PHOTO COMM.

After researching this piece, Seattle-based writer Mary Catherine O'Connor prefers to snowboard the backcountry accompanied by Japhy, her friend's retriever.

## Steak & Seafood At Their Best... At The Summit.

Serving the finest USDA Prime Beef available

Enjoy a casual, relaxed dining experience at the Aurora Summit. Choose your favorite...

U.S.D.A. prime aged beef, shrimp, crab, lobster tail, salmon, chicken or lamb chops.

Complete dinners or ala-carte.



*just* **USDA PRIME STEAK & SEAFOOD HOUSE**

2700 South Havana

303-751-2112

**PIANO BAR**  
(Call for hours)

**GLASS MENAGERIE**  
"Dance to a Combo"  
Wed.-Sat. 9 pm-Close

Dinner Nightly - Monday-Sunday  
Early Dining - Monday-Sunday  
"Locally owned and operated"

Also serving **EXTRAORDINARY ACCOMPANIMENTS**

[www.aurorasummit.com](http://www.aurorasummit.com)

### Award Winning Wine List, "World Class" Jazz, Rhythm & Blues & Contemporary Cuisine...

**B**oulder, Colorado. **TRIOS Grille and Wine Bar...** Choose from over 300 different bottles of wine from around the world and more than 50 wines by the glass from TRIOS award winning wine list. Relax in TRIOS wine and full service bar and grille, while listening to live, "world class" jazz or rhythm and blues performed by such artists as Nelson Rangell, a national recording artist playing contemporary jazz on both the sax and flute; Jeff Colella, a jazz pianist, who also coordinates music for Grammy winner Lou Rawls; Denver's and Boulder's own Rich Chiaraluce on sax, Ellyn Rucker and Eric Gunnison on piano and both Mark Diamond and Mark Simon on bass; blues artists Ben Stevens and Lionel Young; David Booker's Swingtet; and "Latin" jazz by Combo Loco. TRIOS is located in downtown Boulder on the northwest corner of Broadway and Canyon Boulevards and offers contemporary cuisine in a casual atmosphere, during lunch and dinner, 7 days a week, as well as brunch on Sunday. In addition to TRIOS award winning wine list, enjoy fantastic martini specials, ports and single malt scotches and, of course, the best view of the "Flatirons" and mountains in Boulder.

**D**enver, Colorado. Also visit **TRIOS ENOTECA...** Denver's finest wine, martini and cigar bar located in lower downtown (in Lodo) across from Union Station.



Award winning wine list and cuisine.

**ENOTECA** offers an award winning wine list and full bar services that include martinis, ports, single malt scotches, bourbons and regional beers. **ENOTECA** also has the best, on-premise selection of cigars in Denver and fabulous appetizers which can easily serve as a complete dinner, late afternoon or evening snack. Tuesday through Saturday enjoy a cabaret atmosphere with a happy hour from 4:00 pm to 7:00 pm and the best late night live jazz or rhythm and blues in Lodo as performed by many of the same local and national recording artists playing at TRIOS in Boulder.

#### TRIOS Grille and Wine Bar

1155 Canyon Boulevard  
(At Broadway and Canyon  
Boulevards)  
Boulder, Colorado 80302  
303-442-8400  
<http://www.triosgrille.com>  
e-mail: [trios@triosgrille.com](mailto:trios@triosgrille.com)

#### TRIOSenoteca

1730 Wynkoop Street  
(Across from Union Station)  
Denver, Colorado 80302  
303-293-2887  
<http://www.triosenoteca.com>  
e-mail: [enoteca@triosenoteca.com](mailto:enoteca@triosenoteca.com)