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Thursday, Sept. 18, 1997

Hoopeston's only locally-owned daily news publication!

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## Newest members of county dive team learn rescue nuts and bolts

Experienced members of the Vermilion County Dive Team are teaching new members the nuts and bolts of search and rescue using nuts and bolts.

Divers Doug Wagoner and Merle Miller are working with six Vermilion County sheriff's deputies, teaching them skills needed for search and rescue.

Wagoner, a Hoopeston police officer, and Miller, a sheriff's deputy, were among seven charter members of the dive team when it began in August 1980.

The newest divers - Kurt Miller, Pat Ablinger, Tom Cruppenink, Kenny McClain, Bill Cottrell and Dave Harold - are all certified divers, Wagoner said. However, they are certified sport divers, not search and rescue. "What we do is a whole different thing," he said.

The main thing new divers are learning is to stay calm in crisis situations, Wagoner said. They are also practicing such things as black water diving, when visibility is zero.

To do this, Wagoner and Miller put black tape on the

divers' masks, then have them look for objects as small as nuts and bolts. "It's not like we just look for bodies," Wagoner said. "We teach them to look for small things because sometimes we're looking for evidence - a gun or a knife.

The ability to find small items has come in handy for Wagoner, who once searched a local pit for a woman's engagement ring. "I wend and I found it," he said. "It tickled her to death."

Deputy divers are also learning diving patterns used for search and rescue, as well as rope signals.

Rope signals are the way divers communicate with land tenders in a boat or on shore. Ropes go from the boat or shore to the buoyency compensator - what air tanks are in - and wrapped three times around the diver's arm.

To communicate, the person on either end of the rope uses a series of tugs, Wagoner said. For example, three

**See RESCUE on other side**

## Woman charged with four counts of murder in husband's death

A Rossville woman was charged Tuesday with four counts of murder in the fatal shooting of her husband Sunday.

Rhonda Stephenson, 37, was released Tuesday afternoon on \$75,000 bond after her parents posted \$7,500.

Stephenson is charged with shooting Terry D. Stephenson, 44, outside his home at 135 E. Attica, Rossville, at about 7:45 p.m. Sunday.

Mr. Stephenson was taken to Hoopeston Community Memorial Hospital, where he died at approximately 8:43 p.m., said Gary Miller, Vermilion County Sheriff's Department chief investigator.

Stephenson had been shot more than once, he said.

According to court records, Stephenson's attorney, Carl Kagawa, said Stephenson shot her husband in order to protect her 17-year-old son during a domestic dispute at the Rossville home. Kagawa claimed Stephenson was a victim of domestic abuse during her eight-year marriage.

Following the shooting, police received two 911 calls - one from a neighbor and one from Stephenson - requesting help.

Miller questioned Stephenson after Sunday's incident, but she was not arrested until Monday, when the Vermilion County State's Attorney's office requested she be charged with murder.

Stephenson turned herself in to police after she was

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## Police News



**James W. Kostecka**, 34, of 841 E. Seminary, was arrested at 2:35 p.m. Tuesday on a Vermilion County warrant for two counts of domestic battery.

Kostecka was released on \$300 cash bond.

**An unidentified person** was treated at Hoopeston Community Memorial Hospital, the result of an accident at 7:40 p.m. Tuesday.

Police said the person was a passenger in a 1986 Mercury driven by Erica J. Buchmeier, route 1, Cissna Park.

According to reports, Buchmeier was northbound on South Market and was going to turn left at East Main. Buchmeier reportedly did not see a 1993

Chevrolet driven by Mark K. Flook, route 1, Boswell, Ind.

Flook was southbound on South Market, police said.

Buchmeier was ticketed for failure to yield turning left and failure to wear a seat belt (driver).

**Eddie Edwards**, 865 E. Seminary, reported Wednesday that someone through a beer bottle through a window at 112 N. Market.

The damage was done late Tuesday or early Wednesday, police said.

### **Rescue** continued from other side

tugs can mean "it's time to come in" or "I'm ready to come in," depending on who is doing the tugging, he said. Four tugs from the land tender means "are you ok," while four tugs from the diver signals trouble, he said.

Training, which started at the Hoopeston swimming pool, has moved to deeper water at Leisure Time Estates in Danville. Sixty-five foot strip pits there will give neophyte divers the experience of deep diving, compared to practicing in 12 feet of water at the Hoopeston pool. "It's a whole different scenario," Wagoner said.

It will take approximately one year before the new divers are ready to perform search and rescue operations, but Wagoner and Miller, who are volunteering their time, are happy to put in the time. "I'm glad to do it," he said. "There are certain times we've got to do something for the community, to give something back."

Once fully trained, divers will be based in Vermilion County but may be called to other locations for searches. Wagoner has searched in Watseka, Springfield and locations in Indiana. The U.S. Drug Enforcement Area also called the group to Lake Shelbyville when part of a head was found in the water there.

Wagoner, who is also certified in cold water near drowning and is nationally certified in underwater investigations, began diving in 1980 after a seven-year-old girl drowned in a boating accident near Danville. "I had a daughter who was seven," he said.

Rescuers were hampered in their efforts by water too high and too fast to search. Once the water receded, Wagoner and other volunteers waded through the area searching for the girl's body.

The incident so touched him that Wagoner learned to dive, then approached the Hoopeston city council to pay for equipment.

The council agreed and Wagoner and Miller, along with former Hoopeston residents Doug and Alan Burge and Jim Murdoch, and Terry Hume of Oakwood and Ernie Logan of Champaign, formed the dive team.

Over the past 17 years, the team has dwindled to three members, including sheriff's deputy Dan Auterman. That's the reason why new divers are being trained.

"We need new divers," Wagoner said. "I'd like to see us have 15, but this is a start."

### **In the hospital**



**Hoopeston Community Memorial Hospital**  
Sept. 16, 1997

**Admitted:** none.

**Discharged:** Florence McCalla, Hoopeston.

### **Weather**



Partly sunny, breezy, warm today. High 85. Tonight, fair. Low 56. Tomorrow, partly sunny. High near 83, low near 64.



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## Classifieds

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Hoopeston Migrant Headstart is now accepting applications for Family Services Coordinator. Must be fluent in written and spoken English and Spanish and have reliable, insured vehicle. Closing date: Sept. 22, 1997. For more information, call (815) 984-3706. EOE. 258-262

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