

Urgent care in the air

Emergency responders train for flights at Rood Center

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The Union, Grass Valley, CA

Published April 17, 2009



REACH flight nurses Kimberly Parker, of Rocklin, left, and Kimberly Krutz, of Rancho Murrieta, participated in a training exercise Thursday at the Rood Administrative Center in Nevada City.

Photo for The Union by David Mirhadi

Kimberly Parker thinks her job is simply the best. "It's what I've wanted to do even when I was taking my prerequisites for nursing," said Parker, 30, a newly minted flight nurse for Redwood Empire Air Care Helicopter (REACH), after taking off on a simulated emergency flight that briefly turned into the real thing Thursday.

"It's the coolest job ever, taking care of patients, and you get to fly," said Parker, a Rocklin resident who is just finishing her training as a medical flight nurse. "I love it. I absolutely love it."

She and flight nurse Kimberly Krutz, of Rancho Murrieta, lifted off under brilliant skies from the Eric Rood Administrative Center aboard the REACH 7 on what was supposed to be a routine training session. Within seconds of the helicopter taking off, the nurses were diverted to a motor-vehicle accident call in Colusa. They were just as quickly called back to the Rood Center infield by dispatchers who canceled the copter.

The training sessions occur about a dozen times a year, said Nevada County Consolidated Fire District Battalion Chief David Ray.

"Between the two services (REACH and CALSTAR, another helicopter air ambulance service), we're flying these all the time."

The twin-engine REACH helicopter, though about 20 years old, can fly where most can't, as it is equipped and rated to operate using instruments only, which means it can get to accidents in rain and fog. The REACH chopper can carry a crew of up to four.

"It's a total team effort," said Krutz, a former fixed-wing flight nurse who has been on the helicopter for a year.

This particular REACH helicopter is stationed in Yuba City, and covers territory from as far south as Sacramento, north to the Oregon border.