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## Local VHRU available when emergency calls

By CAT SMITH/The Daily News

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LAUGHLIN —What would happen if an explosion occurred at one of the casinos and all area police and fire personnel were called to assist, leaving manpower short-handed for other emergencies?

That is where — and when — the members of the Volunteer Homeland Reserve Unit of Southern Nevada come in.

“We all have a variety of special skills and diverse background in law enforcement that comes in handy when called to assist with emergencies,” said Dan Christian, Tri-state coordinator for the VHRU for nearly six years. “We work in conjunction with agencies who request our services.”



READY TO GO: At a moment's notice the group of men and women with the Volunteer Homeland Reserve Unit of Southern Nevada is ready to go when a calamity hits the Tri-state. Pictured above (minus a few) are the members of the VHRU after their first monthly meeting of the new year. Volunteers reside throughout Mohave County, San Bernardino County and Clark County. CAT SMITH/The Daily News

Christian explained during the group's monthly meeting at Don Laughlin's Riverside Resort Hotel & Casino, the unit will be adding Mohave Valley Fire Department to its list of agencies that already includes the Fort Mojave Tribal Police, Las Vegas Metropolitan Police, North Las Vegas Police and Henderson Police. The organization is working on adding more agencies to the list in the coming year.

“Each of these agencies have signed a model of operation understanding agreement with us which allows us to be called out at anytime,” said Christian, who spent several years as a sergeant for the Oxnard (Calif.) Police Department. “If an incident like the one above does occur and the agencies responding don't have an MOU with us, one can be drawn up as a temporary,” explained Christian.

The VHRU is comprised of individuals who are trained and have experience in law enforcement and are available to Laughlin and Mohave County law enforcement agencies to provide volunteer, but trained, assistance to officers during incidents that may overwhelm their existing resources.

The VHRU members reside in southern Nevada, southern Mohave County, which includes Bullhead City and Lake Havasu City, and San Bernardino County, Calif. The trained men and women can immediately come to the assistance of a strained agency, operating under the direct control of the local agency. VHRU volunteers aren't usually armed when acting in their volunteer role, but most have the certification to be armed and carry weapons, if the agency requests them to do so.

There are more than 300 volunteers — 34 locally — in the unit and have an average of more than 20 years of professional law enforcement experience in a variety of local, state, and federal agencies. Their experience runs the gamut from patrol to department chief to death investigators to retired special agents with Homeland Security. They will respond to critical incidents anywhere in Nevada and Mohave County at the request of any agency with whom they have an operating agreement. These types of incidents may include natural or man-caused disasters, missing children, hazardous material spills, major criminal investigations or other incidents that strain department resources.

“Their goal is to provide experienced personnel so local law enforcement officers can concentrate on more pressing matters,” Christian said. “Even if digital services become paralyzed, we have three volunteers who are certified to operate HAM radios so communication can still be available for law enforcement personnel.”

As for funding, the group relies on membership dues and donations after grant funding was eliminated during federal budget cuts in the past couple years.

“We were funded under the Federal Emergency Management in Nevada and when they lost close to \$8