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Photo contributed by the NCSP

The National Canoe Safety Patrol (NCSP) started in 1979—a group of volunteer paddlers from area canoe clubs—and has doubled in membership since.

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## National Canoe Safety Patrol celebrates 40th season

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By ELIZABETH LEPRO

One day in the middle of summer, 2012, Marc Magnus-Sharpe, his son John and his wife Sarah drove three hours from Ithaca to Sullivan County, as they did on so many days in so many summers, to paddle on the Delaware River.

"You're sitting somewhere and a boat goes over and if not for you being there, somebody could have had a moment that they can't recover from."

That day, Magnus-Sharpe and his crew members, all part of the [National Canoe Safety Patrol \(NCSP\)](#), were patrolling a beautiful stretch of the Delaware, above Cedar Rapids, beginning at a point near the Tel Yehudah camp and the Chicken Coop on Route 97. Above and below Magnus-Sharpe were other members of the crew, waiting to catch gear and equipment if anyone were to tip over into the wash. The group paddled downriver to Shohola, just below the Barryville Bridge. There, another big, busy rapid followed a hard right turn in the river.

The group stopped to have lunch, their boats pointed into the water, poised to take off at any moment. You can picture the day: sunny, midsummer, the birds chirping, the river flowing and the light, contemplative sounds of nature breaking the silence. "The way it always works," Magnus-Sharpe said, recalling the day, "is that just when someone unwraps their sandwich, ready to take a big bite," trouble strikes.

Sure enough, a family kayaked into view. Magnus-Sharpe took a quick assessment of the situation: three grandparents, four parents and three children; two or three people with no life jackets; some heftier members of the group weighing close to 300

pounds; and all clearly beginners. "It's a hard rapid," Magnus-Sharpe said, "and beginners who don't know, they don't understand." In a matter of seconds, all 10 or so kayakers have tipped over and gone into the rapids.

"An older grandparent, without a life jacket, is just really above the water, that's who I go for," Magnus-Sharpe said, and his son goes for the tandem kayak, where a father is bobbing in the water trying to hold onto two kids. "Everyone's screaming."

"I'm able to get the elderly grandmother... up out of the water to breathe and the grandmother—she can't speak English, but she's grabbing her heart," Magnus-Sharpe recalls. "I'm an EMT, at that point I was a paramedic... we're in good hands, but it's really getting critical."

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**"At the beginning of the morning, I had no idea. I just kind of had that feeling that I should be there."**

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NCSP members performing a demo rescue. Photo from the NCSP website.

The safety patrol members had trained for moments like this. They're able to get to everyone flailing in the swift water, and take advantage of a raft floating by to get the kayakers to shore and, eventually, connected to emergency medical services. "You never really know where you're going to be needed," Magnus-Sharpe said. "At the beginning of the morning, I had no idea. I just kind of had that feeling that I should be there. You're sitting somewhere and a boat goes over and if not for you being there, somebody could have had a moment that they can't recover from."

Since its inception in 1979, that has been the directive of the NCSP: go where you might be needed and take action when necessary. This summer, the patrol will embark on its 40th year patrolling the river during its busiest months.

To celebrate, Magnus-Sharpe said, the patrol will invite some of the founding members, including Chris Nielsen (see page 16) and Bill and June Snellings, to its fall dinner at the end of the season. The patrol will also have a special event in June with the Delaware River Sojourn and be present at the National Park Service's Zane Grey Festival, usually in July.

As always, the patrol kicks off the season the first weekend in May with a training weekend at Luke's Landing in Barryville at the Kittatinny Campsite above Cedar Rapids. "We spend two days just getting the rust off and getting our members familiarized with the rescue techniques we use, and lots of camaraderie," Magnus-Sharpe said.

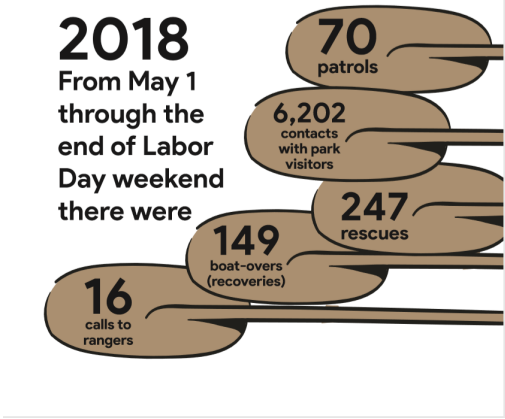
One of the favored activities during the training weekend is the throw bag contest, Magnus-Sharpe said, when members compete to see who can throw the rescue bags—filled with rope—the farthest. At the end of the season, members are awarded at a banquet dinner, where some get free gear and giveaways. "It's a good mix of good food, good gear [and] good campfire experiences that keeps people coming back," he said.

The patrol's membership hovers in the high 80s to the 90s. Members are only required to be on the river four weekend days a season. You'll likely see them paddling in groups of four—and if you do, offer a wave and a thank you.

You never know when the water will get the best of you, and you might need them.

To read more about the NCSP from our special anniversary supplement on the group, click [here](#).

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