



Santa Barbara Sheriff's Office



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News Release

Fatally Injured Paraglider Recovered by Rescue Crews

Santa Barbara – A paraglider who was fatally injured on Thanksgiving Day, November 24, 2016, has been identified as being 56-year-old Marjorie “Marge” Variano of Cornelius, North Carolina. Variano, a veteran hang gliding and paragliding instructor, formerly of Santa Barbara, was with a large group of friends paragliding off Gibraltar Road on Thanksgiving Day. When she did not arrive to the pre-designated landing area, several of the paragliders in the group began an aerial search. At approximately 1:15 p.m., one of the paragliders spotted what appeared to be a downed paraglider approximately 1,500 feet down from La Cumbre Peak at the bottom of a cliff and called 911.

The Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Search and Rescue Team (SBCSAR), Santa Barbara County Fire Department, American Medical Response, U.S. Forest Service and the Santa Barbara County Sheriff/Fire Air Support Unit were paged out to respond. Dispatchers with the Santa Barbara County Public Safety Dispatch Center worked with the group of paragliders to compute an approximate GPS location for the downed paraglider.

Copter 3 flew the coordinates and located the paraglider's chute but could not see the pilot. Due to the location up a box canyon, Copter 3 hoisted down a County Fire paramedic further down the canyon. After hiking over an hour up the canyon, the paramedic was able to climb to the location and found the pilot deceased. Copter 2 flew SBCSAR members into the canyon to scout possible recovery routes for ground teams. Given the steep terrain and fading light, it was determined the recovery effort would be too hazardous for the flight crew and SBCSAR members and a plan was coordinated for the following morning.

Yesterday morning, November 25, Santa Barbara County Sheriff/Fire Air Support Unit and SBCSAR personnel worked together for more than five hours to recover the decedent. Twelve search and rescue members coordinated with Copter 3 to insert via helicopter hoist eight technical mountain rescue personnel along with ropes, technical rescue gear, stretcher and brush cutting tools approximately 175 feet above the steep sandstone cliff where the paraglider was located. Search and Rescue team members rappelled down to the paraglider and carried her out by stretcher. A rope rescue system was used to raise the stretcher team back up to the top of the cliff where Copter 3 then flew in and performed a hoist transport of the decedent and then flew back in to transport out the Search and Rescue team members.

The Sheriff's Coroner's Unit is conducting an active investigation to determine the cause and manner of death. It should be noted that because paragliding is a self-regulated sport, the Coroner's death investigation does not encompass technical matters related to the paragliding equipment or paragliding procedures. Questions related to paragliding should be directed to the **United States Hang Gliding and Paragliding Association (USHPA)** at www.ushpa.aero/default.asp







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