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A PUBLICATION BY AND FOR THE EMPLOYEES OF CREW MANAGEMENT SERVICES



Happy Holidays at Harriman

Celebrating the holiday season, Crew Management Services employees gathered with employees from throughout Harriman Dispatching Center Dec. 22 for the annual Holiday Dinner.

Employees from all departments on all three shifts enjoyed meals from Omaha's Abraham Catering, which included a variety of dishes and desserts to suit everyone's tastes.

Along with the good food and good conversation, employees also received Union Pacific mugs, and CMS General Director Hasan Hyder made the rounds to personally wish all CMS employees happy holidays.

"I thought that was very classy, and the whole holiday celebration was very nice," said Mike Penny, crew dispatcher. "It got the holiday weekend off to a great start."

HDC employees enjoy catered holiday meals Dec. 22.



Whiteout

The shelter building sits among rocks near Mount Whitney's summit.

Michael Abraham will never forget the text message from his son, Philip, last fall.

In fact, Michael, a train crew dispatcher for Crew Management Services, still has the cryptic Oct. 18 message saved in his cellular phone. He reads it every now and then, reflecting on how lucky his son and his friends were.

Me dale and steve are stuck in the shelter at top of whitney. need to send support. can't find trail. need some supplies.

The message was sent to Michael and Philip's fiancée, Brandy O'Connor. Unsure if the text made it, Philip and his two hiking companions — Dale Clymens and Steve Filips — settled in on the snow-covered peak of California's Mount Whitney and waited.

The trip's plan was simple and fun: A 50- to 60-mile bike ride through Death Valley — the lowest below-sea-level point in North America — and then a hike up the 14,500-foot face of Mount Whitney, the highest point in the contiguous United States. The group set out Monday, Oct. 18, for what they thought would be a relaxing day of hiking and beautiful scenery.

Philip had been involved with the Landmark Endurance Team, a group organized by his boss at Landmark Management in Omaha, where he works. Made up of extreme sports enthusiasts, hiking is a staple of the group's

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Whiteout

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activities.

For the trip to Mount Whitney, Philip had asked his father to join them.

"I had to work that weekend, and couldn't make the trip," Michael said.

Michael had sent his son a text message late Oct. 18, the Monday night the hikers became stranded, asking how things were going. But he never got a response. It was not until early the next morning, as Michael was getting ready to head into work, that he received the message that told him his son was in trouble.

Finding Shelter

Philip and his friends started the climb from Mount Whitney's base with a group of 10 hikers, each of whom eventually broke into subgroups tailored to their skill levels. As Philip and the other two approached the summit, they met another group of hikers on their way down who told them they weren't far from the top.

Moments later, snow flurries began.

By the time the three men reached the summit, they were in the middle of a blizzard. Whiteout conditions prevented them from spotting the stone and tin shelter building they knew was there. As visibility became impossible and the weather continued

to deteriorate, they discussed heading back down the mountain. But the three decided to stay and find the shelter.

Somehow, they spotted the shelter through the darkness and blowing snow. The 100-year-old structure was small, offering no more than a 10-by-10-foot room for the three of them to share. They found a crawl space to another room, which contained a few supplies and food, mostly 10-year-old military rations.

For water, they melted snow, which was now piling up as high as 10 feet outside their tiny shelter.

But for the time being, they were safe from the cold and snow.

The Home Front

Meanwhile, Michael and others in Omaha were feverishly contacting California authorities.

"I did not sleep much that week," Michael said. "I spent time with family and friends, who kept me sane, and made phone calls about every four hours to talk to someone on the rescue liaison team. That was pretty much my entire week."

During those four agonizing days and nights, Michael and his family received non-stop support from friends and co-workers.

"The support was tremendous," he said.

"I received countless cards, letters and e-mails, not just from friends and people here at Harriman, but from employees out in the field. I've never felt so much support."

That support, he said, helped put him at ease during the hours of waiting, when there was little else to do but ponder and pray.

California's Inyo County search and rescue team began the search for the hikers Oct. 19, about 11 a.m., but had to call it off when weather conditions became too dangerous. The next day, Wednesday, the search resumed with 45 volunteers, but was again cut short by bad weather.

Breakthrough

After three days, Philip and his friends decided that if they were still there the next day, they would take their chances and try to make their way down the mountain. At one point, they began calling out to anyone who might possibly hear them.

Incredibly, soon after they began yelling, a reply came from a member of the rescue team, which by then had made it to within earshot of the hikers on the summit.

Within 20 minutes, a helicopter from the California



Dale Clymens surveys the area Oct. 20, the third day of the hikers' ordeal.

Army National Guard was evacuating the group from the mountain.

On Thursday, about 1 p.m. Omaha time, Michael received the call: His son and the other two hikers had been rescued.

“It was the first time that week I was able to breathe easy,” Michael said. “I was very thankful.”

Dehydrated and weak, Philip and his friends were taken for medical treatment and soon released. The helicopter pilots who lifted the men from the summit even spent the night with them at their hotel, sharing dinner and discussing the ordeal.

Home, Sweet Home

Though he has not been hiking since, Philip already is planning another hike in February to the top of Colorado’s Mount Elbert — the second-highest peak in the lower 48 states.

Future climbs on Philip’s wish list include a summer trip to a mountain in Mexico and, eventually, Africa’s famed Mount Kilimanjaro.

The three hikers received interview requests from national media outlets such as The Today Show and Good Morning America, but declined.

“They just didn’t want the national attention,” Michael said.

Philip still wants his father to join him on a hike, and Michael plans to give it a shot — in warmer weather.

“No cold weather climbs for me,” he said.



Michael Abraham, crew dispatcher, remembers a harrowing week in October awaiting word from his son, Philip, who was one of three Omaha hikers stranded atop California’s Mount Whitney.

Originally from Omaha, Michael began his railroad career in 1977 in the stores department at the Omaha Shop. He and his wife, Irene, have been married 24 years. He also has a daughter, Annie, 23.

Philip and Brandy are engaged. Brandy has two children — son Conner, age 14, and daughter Elyse, 8 — while Philip has two children: daughter Taylor, 15, and son Donnavinne, 15 months.

When Philip and the others returned to Omaha Oct. 22, five days after their hike began, about 100 relatives, friends and well-wishers were there to greet them at the airport. Among them was Donnavinne, who had taken his first steps just four days earlier — the same day his father became stranded.

When Philip emerged from the crowd, Donnavinne trotted a few steps under his own power to welcome his surprised, teary-eyed Dad home.



Philip Abraham begins his hike up Mount Whitney Oct. 18, unaware of what awaits.



Melted snow provides drinking water for the three stranded hikers.



The tiny shelter atop Mount Whitney offers little space.



From left, Philip Abraham, Dale Clymens and Steve Filips relax at the hospital after their rescue.