

Civil Air Patrol applauded for its rescue work

Contributed by 1st Lt. Jeff Roberson
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A state emergency management official on Thursday praised the work of the state's Civil Air Patrol during the snowstorm that buried western Kansas in January.

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"They obviously have a lot of capabilities that I was frankly unaware of until we started using them during this disaster," Dan Hay said Thursday.

Mike Burley / The Capital-Journal John R. Schmidt, pilot, shows off the key features of a Gippsland GA-8, which is used by the Civil Air Patrol in rescue missions. The Civil Air Patrol is part private, volunteer, and a nonprofit auxiliary of the Air Force. Schmidt illustrated the special GPS and navigational devices used in emergency situations at a news conference Thursday.

KANSAS WING OF CAP

- 11 squadrons, including one in Topeka

- Four planes

- 171 cadets

- 275 adult officers

- About 20 vehicles

Membership is open to eligible individuals 11 and older year. For more information, see www.cap.gov.

Hay is the operations branch chief for the Division of Emergency Management for Kansas.

"They did in hours what it would take days" for a small sheriff's department to do on the ground, Hay said.

"You guys are an unbelievable asset," Hay told CAP officials. CAP also is cost-efficient, Hay said. A CAP aircraft costs \$46 an hour plus fuel versus \$4,500 an hour for an Army National Guard helicopter, he said. CAP, a volunteer unit, is an auxiliary of the Air Force.

CAP officials talked about two of their aircraft on Thursday in a hangar at Forbes Field. During the storm in western Kansas, CAP flew 65 sorties during three days starting Jan. 1.

Lt. Col. Ed Hill flew nine hours on one day and eight hours another in a CAP aircraft. CAP pilots flew along Interstate 70 and US-50 highway to search for stranded motorists and later did grid searches in northwest Kansas, looking for snowbound motorists, residents whose homes were drifted in by snow, and cattle and horses that had crossed drifted-over fences and were without food or water.

Problem locations were reported so help could be dispatched to assist people or feed livestock.

The two CAP aircraft on display Thursday were a Cessna 182 and a Gippsland GA-8, which are equipped with global positioning systems, satellite digital imaging systems allowing transmission of airborne digital photos and direction finders to locate downed aircraft.

The Gippsland, a rugged aircraft developed to fly in the Australian outback, is equipped with a hyperspectral imaging system, said John Schmidt, vice commander for the Kansas CAP wing. The imaging system will search the ground for a specific plane, vehicle or object that its instructed to search for, or anything that appears out of place, Schmidt said.

In late 2006, a Gippsland was used to find a downed aircraft that disappeared in Oklahoma. The crashed plane was found on the first day when the hyperspectral system spotted a wing of the wrecked craft, Schmidt said.

The new Gippsland is one of only 16 distributed across the United States in the CAP.

The Gippsland, which is based at the Downtown Airport in Kansas City, Mo., serves Kansas and Missouri.