

Unusual save highlights diversity in rural rescues

By Randy Mankin

Courtesy of *The Eldorado Success*

A young Junction woman spent more than three hours one evening in October near the top of a 220-foot tower before rescuers convinced her to return to the ground. The tower, used for television transmission, is in Eldorado, south of San Angelo.

EMS and fire department volunteers T. J. Rodriguez, EMT-B, and Joey Jones, EMT-B, followed the woman up the tower, owned by Christoval Communications, minutes after a 9-1-1 operator received the first call about the incident.

The woman was reportedly distraught and threatening to jump from the tower when Rodriguez reached her. She was sitting on a “torque arm” where guy wires attach just below the top of the tower, with her feet dangling off the edge.

“It looked several times like she was going to jump,” Rodriguez said later. “I had to yell at her a few times to look at me. Then I would get her attention back and she would calm down.”

Rodriguez said she was concerned about her baby. The child was reportedly in the care of grandparents who later brought the child to the scene in hopes of coaxing the woman to climb back to the ground.

Authorities say the woman was able to access the tower by parking a Jeep near the fence surrounding the base of the tower. She then climbed on top of the vehicle, placed a blanket over three strands of barbed wire at the top of the chain link fence, and climbed over the fence.

Juan Rameriz was feeding his horse nearby and noticed a woman was climbing the tower. He quickly phoned to report it to the Sheriff’s Department. Ramirez would later



T. J. Rodriguez’s conversation, coupled with words of encouragement from friends and family on the ground, persuaded the woman to make her way to the center of the tower where Rodriguez was able to secure her with a safety line. Photo by Kathy Mankin.

join the rescue attempt and scale the tower to within 20 feet of the woman in order to bring a radio and drinking water up to Rodriguez and Jones.

Sheriff’s Department units responded, as did Eldorado Volunteer Fire Department personnel and a Schleicher County EMS ambulance. Electrical power was shut off to the tower, causing an interruption in cable TV service throughout the town.

At one point, the woman climbed to the top of the tower, nearly reaching the beacon light atop the structure. She later retreated a few feet and settled on the torque arm, but then slid along the arm until her feet hung over the edge.

Rodriguez was the first to reach the woman. He began talking with her and urging her to move toward him so he could secure her with a safety line. Meanwhile, Jones climbed up from below bringing climbing gear, a pulley and a half-inch rope with which to

lower her to the ground if she agreed to come to the center of the tower.

On the ground, the Sheriff’s Department’s mobile command post was dispatched to the scene. A camera atop the unit zoomed in on the woman so authorities could gauge her reaction as counseling psychologist Jane Kosub, First Methodist Church pastor Steven Rowe, and Sheriff David Doran spoke to her over a loud speaker. Friends and family members also took turns urging the woman to come down from the tower.

Darkness slowly set in, severely limiting the ability of those on the ground to monitor activity on the tower. However, some 200 feet above, Rodriguez continued to talk with the woman. His efforts, coupled with words of encouragement being sent up from below by loud speaker, eventually persuaded the woman to make her way back to the center of



Rodriguez and Jones scaled a 220-foot tower in Eldorado to rescue a distraught woman. Photo by Kathy Mankin.

the tower where Rodriguez was able to secure her with a safety line.

They climbed down a few feet to where Jones had rigged a rope and pulley. A makeshift harness was placed on the woman, and she was carefully brought to the ground on the inside of the three-sided tower.

Sheriff Doran met her on the ground and escorted her to a waiting ambulance for transport to Schleicher County Medical Center. She was later transported by the sheriff to the Hill Country Mental Health Mental Retardation center in Kerrville.

The following day, Doran said he was proud of the way the community pulled together in a time of crisis and he praised the rescue effort mounted by T. J. Rodriguez and Joey Jones.

“We are fortunate to have people like T. J. and Joey who step up when others would hesitate,” Doran said. “If you ask me, they are heroes.”

Fire Chief Jerry Jones had similar praise for the emergency services personnel who gathered at the tower and stayed until the end. “You never know how these things will turn out,” Jones said. “I was pleased with how well it all came together.”

The infant’s grandmother was thankful for the volunteers who rushed to help her grandchild’s mother. “[She] is getting the help she needs because people like Jane, T. J. and Joey were willing to put themselves at risk . . . and we appreciate them all.”



Schleicher County EMS and Eldorado Volunteer Fire Department volunteers T. J. Rodriguez, EMT-B, and Joey Jones, EMT-B. Photo by Kathy Mankin.