

The Illiana HUMMER Club is a Club on a Mission.  
Putting a HERT on Emergencies  
By Jeff (Hoosier by blood) Wright

Illiana? It's kind of a strange name. But, what do you call a HUMMER Club that encompasses members from both sides of the Illinois-Indiana border? Ahhh...Illiana, of course!

Now, on what portion of that shared border can you find the IHC? That would be the northwest corner of Indiana and the Chicago area of Illinois. Illiana HUMMER Club co-founder Mark Price was quick to point out the "orphan" status of the club's headquarters in NW Indiana. "We're in an area of Indiana called "the Region", explained Mark. "Many Hoosiers refer to our area as the *armpit* of Indiana. They look at us as the blue-collar extension of Chicago; steel mills, farming, and a lot of ethnic diversity. Mayor Daley and the rest of Chicago knows we're not part of *their* city. So, we're in a region unclaimed by either." This outcast distinction of counties in northwest Indiana is a stark contrast to the thriving and collaborating nature of a HUMMER club that knows no boundaries.

Loosely formed by a handful of HUMMER owners back in 2000, the club really picked up steam as an active and increasingly well-known part of the community in 2002. As Mark puts it, "It was pretty lean in the beginning. My friend and co-founder, Manny Navarro, owned one H1, and combined with my two H1s, we made up almost 50% of the club. We slowly increased membership by flagging down the drivers of the occasional HUMMERs we saw driving down the highway. Being in a unique fraternity, drivers would always stop, we'd chat for a while, exchange business cards, and be on our way only to meet later for some dinner or an off-roading adventure".

The Illiana HUMMER Club participates in typical club-like activities; off-roading on weekends, BBQ picnics, car shows, community service, etc. But what really sets them apart from most other clubs is their involvement with law enforcement, and in particular, Disaster assistance and Search and Rescue.

The IHC first got into the emergency rescue business due to the harsh weather that occurs in their part of the country, especially in the winter. Compounding the bad snowstorms they experience is the fact that the National Guard has been depleted, with units and their equipment being deployed to the Middle East.

Members of the IHC started to be called on to provide occasional emergency transport for stranded motorists caught in heavy snowstorms on the highways in and around Lake County, Indiana. Through these emergency transport events, the IHC developed a relationship with County Sheriff John Buncich, who helped establish the Search and Rescue arm of their organization, H.E.R.T (HUMMER Emergency Response Team). With the help of Sheriff Buncich, the IHC members received special training and became certified as well as deputized to carry out duties as a supplemental component of local law enforcement and emergency services.

One of the most recent search events that IHC members became part of was when a freshman at Purdue went missing one wintery January day. After searching the campus and adjoining land, law enforcement agencies asked the IHC members to mobilize H.E.R.T. as part of a search and recovery effort in nearby areas. IHC HUMMERS joined volunteers on horseback and ATVs to access difficult areas adjacent to a large river in West Lafayette. Mark Price recalls a very harrowing day during the search; “It was the coldest day on record for that day in northwest Indiana. With a wind chill factor, the outside temperature was 20 degrees below zero. A number of volunteers were searching along the banks of the river, when suddenly one of the search horses lost its footing, plunging rider and horse down the embankment, and into the fast moving current of the icy river below. The rider was able to get back to shore and crawl back up the bank, but the horse was in dire straits. With water temperature in the 30s, and no stable ground for the horse to climb onto, the animal was losing strength quickly and it would not be long before the horse drowned in the freezing current.

Quads and other ATVs were nearby, but were helpless to offer assistance. Scott Robbins was in the immediate vicinity and rushed his HUMMER to the riverbank. While Scott prepared his winch, volunteers carefully entered the fast-moving water and harnessed the panicking horse with ropes and straps. Scott slowly pulled the horse out of the river, up the embankment, and onto stable ground. Although only minutes had elapsed, the search horse was thoroughly exhausted and certainly would have perished without the fast acting and well trained HUMMER owner.

Along with being trained for a variety of emergency responses (including disaster incident command-and-control, CPR/AED, SARS, Hazmat, Underwater rescue, etc...) the H.E.R.T. team has signed MOUs (Memorandums of Understandings) with different local agencies within the membership areas, defining what their roles, responsibilities, and limitations are. The HUMMERS of H.E.R.T. are not part of the first-responder units, but they add an important, critical feature to Search and

Rescue and disaster assistance that most agencies can't afford to have as a full-time asset.

When called upon, H.E.R.T.'s HUMMERs commit to get two HUMMERs to a scene within one hour. Within 2 ½ to 3 hours, up to ten HUMMERs can be deployed on-site to an emergency need. To have this kind of capability available on such short notice, agencies are happy to reimburse H.E.R.T. members for accommodations, food, and fuel.

When asked about the risk to the club's HUMMERs (and owners), Mark explained; "Nicks and scratches are parts of the job we've agreed to be involved in. When an assistance request comes in, we quickly assess whether or not we are capable of handling the request. Once all HERT members agree to assist, the safety of our vehicles is in our own hands. We're all highly experienced, and we would never put ourselves, our vehicles, or others in unnecessarily high risk situation".

So, when the IHC isn't out saving man or beast, what are they up to?

The Illiana HUMMER Club has to be one of the most active HUMMER organizations on the planet. Come rain or shine (and by the look at the pictures on their web-site, there's plenty of rain to contend with), the club is constantly involved in one event or another. Besides regular off-roading activities, the club participates in; parades, car shows, BBQ's, charity fundraisers, membership meetings, and caravans to special events on either side of the state border. The "Badlands" of Indiana are a popular locale for a weekend of rock and log climbing, gully-traversing, and trail riding. The club has constructed an off-road obstacle course for members of all calibers to enjoy. It's especially valuable to new HUMMER owners who would like to get acclimated to off-roading.

Some of the most satisfying activities involve supporting our communities, charities, and helping kids in need. The IHC volunteers at the regional Special Olympics and is a big supporter of the March of Dimes. Another charity entity called Camp Quality, which is located in Frankfort, Illinois, was established to help improve the remaining time of kids with terminal illnesses. It provides one of the most anticipated community events on the Club's calendar. "It's formatted like Make-A-Wish camp for children with terminal illnesses", explains Mark. "The difference is that this organization stays with and supports the family of the child throughout the illness. Along with members of the Blue Knights (a motorcycle club composed of law enforcement officers from a variety of law enforcement agencies), the HUMMERs of the IHC caravan into downtown Frankfort escorted by motorcycles and police vehicles, pulling an Outback Steakhouse trailer behind

one of the HUMMERS. A BBQ picnic is then set up for the children while Hummer and motorcycle rides are given to campers through beautiful downtown Frankfort, IL”.

Perhaps it was the club’s incredible commitment to the Community, or maybe it was Mark Price’s unmatched passion for the HUMMER and off-roading, but the club’s most notable accomplishment happened within the last year. An area of northern Indiana known as “The Dunes” had been a popular off-roading destination for many years. A group of environmental activists studying the area determined that irresponsible ORV operators had destroyed fragile areas of the Dunes over the years. Efforts from the DNR such as steep fines, arrests, and confiscation of vehicles were not providing the answers for the on-going problem. Trespassing, littering, disruption of natural habitats, and the overall destruction by irresponsible ORV operators needed to be stopped but there were no simple answers. This led to the 2 day seminar/forum hosted by the Save the Dunes Foundation. After requests to numerous ORV groups throughout Indiana, IHC founder Mark Price was the sole voice representing off-roading as an organization. Mark gave an impassioned speech and presentation using a variety of information from organizations like the Blue Ribbon Coalition and Tread Lightly. Using analogies, statistics, past experiences, and common sense that the audience could relate to, Mark suggested a few options to avoid predictable repeat trespassing and unnecessary destruction of natural areas. He proposed that the County, the environmentalists, and the off-roading organizations collaborate to design and build a legal off-road park in the northern region of the state that could be funded in whole or in part by state and federal grants. Mark’s speech and ideas were so effective that as he finished, the mixed-interest audience responded with a standing ovation. The park is on the drawing board, and a community has learned how different factions and interests can solve differences by working together.

HMR salutes Mark Price and the entire Illiana HUMMER Club for their selfless efforts to not only help community members in dire need, but for their ability to work with that same community to help it understand its collective needs. Great job! Happy off-roading and let us know when Mayor Daley decides to try to secede IHC headquarters from Indiana!