

## BOYS RESCUED FROM MINE

STAFF GRAPHIC/The Morning Call

# Two teens saved from Coal Dale mine

■ Heroic efforts by about 70 people rescue two boys from a stripping pit.

By AMY OAKES  
Of The Morning Call

Heroic overnight efforts by about 70 people saved two Lansford teen-agers stuck in a 500-foot stripping pit for up to 11 hours Wednesday and Thursday.

John Urso, 18, and a 13-year-old boy whose name has not been released, escaped with minor injuries. The two, along with Howard McLaughlin, 20, of Lansford and another boy whose name and age have not been released, apparently entered the Lehigh Coal & Navigation Co. property in Coaldale Wednesday afternoon, police said.

All four were walking around

and climbing the walls of the Springdale mining pits. Trouble started when Urso and the 13-year-old became stranded around 4:30 p.m.

The pit is in Summit Hill, Tamaqua and Coaldale. It is about a quarter-mile wide and 500 feet deep and consists of a number of narrow, descending ledges spaced 50 to 60 feet apart.

McLaughlin and the unidentified boy climbed out of the pit, while Urso was stranded on a ledge about 200 feet from the top and 300 feet from the bottom. The 13-year-old was 300 yards away, on a ledge 400 feet down, said Sgt. Shawn Nihen of the Coaldale Police Department.

"Urso was holding onto a tree so he wouldn't fall farther down."

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Signs at the entrance to the Lehigh Coal & Navigation Co. property in Coaldale warn away potential trespassers.

YOUNG HONG  
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Nihen said. "He could have fallen about 200 to 300 feet."

The unidentified boy went home, but Howard McLaughlin remained at the pit, trying to rescue his brother, Nihen said.

Around 11 p.m., mine workers, who had shut down their equipment to start the second shift, heard screams for help coming from the pit.

The workers saw the stranded teens and called for help. When emergency personnel arrived, Joe Porambo, a foreman for LC&N, used mine equipment to plow roads to let rescuers get their equipment closer to the pit's edge.

"The operator for LC&N was clearing roads for emergency vehicles right along the pit. One or two makes of a wrong move and he would have been over the edge," said Coaldale Patrolman Jeremy Sommers.

Coaldale Fire Company's rope and rappel team was able to move into place.

Emergency personnel, which included ambulance and fire department crews from Coaldale and Tamaqua, the Schuylkill County medical unit from Tamaqua, Schuylkill County Emergency Management, and the Coaldale and Summit Hill police departments faced several problems brought on by the night.

"There was no way of illuminating the area," said Schuylkill County Emergency Management Director Art Kaplan.

Rescuers with spotlights stationed on one side of the wide pit illuminated the opposite side, where others worked their way down ledges to the 13-year-old and placed him in a basket. He was raised to safety at 1:48 a.m.

The boy was treated for minor scrapes and ankle injuries at Miners Memorial Medical Center, Coaldale. Urso refused medical treatment.

Nihen said the 13-year-old was more accessible because a road was made for the rescuers to move equipment closer to him.

"The other took more time because it was just a dropoff," Nihen said.

In fact, Kaplan said, personnel considered waiting until daylight to rescue Urso because they didn't have enough light.

"We got the weather information and there was a possibility of precipitation, and it was 40 degrees, so we wanted to get him some clothing," Kaplan said.

Urso, police said, was wearing jeans and a T-shirt.

John R. Poko of the Coaldale Fire Company said that with the falling temperature and uncertainty of Urso's condition, they abandoned the idea of getting warm clothing to Urso and summoned the MedEvac helicopter to the scene to use its spotlights.

With assistance from Summit Hill, Poko said, the same rescue crew that saved the 13-year-old used the same rappelling method to reach Urso and place him in a basket that was hoisted to the surface.

The crew included John C. Poko, Steve Karp, Franklin Klock and Joe Schamonsky, all of the Coaldale Fire Company. "They should be commended for their efforts," Sommers said.

Urso was freed from the pit about 6 a.m. and taken to the Summit Hill Police Department.

Nihen said the investigation has been turned over to the Tamaqua Police Department because LC&N engineers have determined the trespassing occurred in that borough.

The four might be charged with defiant trespass on private property, police said. The summary of offense carries a maximum fine of \$300.

LC&N declined to comment on the incident, but officials thanked the people involved with the rescue. Rescue crews left the scene about 7:30 a.m.

John R. Poko, who held a spotlight during the rescue efforts, said the LC&N employees were very helpful. Overall, he said, the effort went well.

Summit Hill Police Chief Bruce Markovich said there have been similar trespassing incidents.

"Over the past few years, kids have gotten stuck there," he said.

## Boys rescued from mine 2

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