

## Partnership for Life

*“Our gratitude goes to the team at MSHA and the other rescue workers – Federal and State employees who worked together seamlessly to save lives... We are grateful for your courage, perseverance and heart!”*

Elaine L. Chao, Secretary of Labor



On Wednesday July 24, 2002, as the 3 to 11 p.m. shift at the Quecreek #1 Mine neared completion, a massive in-rush of millions of gallons of water suddenly overwhelmed and trapped a nine-man crew mining in one section of this Somerset County, PA mine. The crew had inadvertently broken through a barrier separating the active mining area where they were working from an adjacent abandoned mine filled with water.

When the water gushed into the mine, the trapped miners warned a second crew working the shift to evacuate the mine. The trapped men moved to higher ground to escape the 50-60 degree water that had rushed into the mine. Wet and cold, the men managed to find a small space away from the flood and tried to create a barrier between them and the water. Here they waited for 77 hours, supporting one another in their struggle to survive.

## Nine for Nine

*“The best of America was also represented in the technology and know-how of our mine safety folks — those who, on a moment’s notice, used their skill to devise a way to save life. Took a look at the situation, reacted to the environment, predicted what might happen miles below the earth, and responded. And then rallied others. They set up a plan and a strategy.... our folks are world-renown for mine rescue, and the nation saw why — and there are nine lives here to testify that we’re some of the best at rescuing our fellow citizens.”*

President George W. Bush



The rescuers took on obstacles that appeared insurmountable: pumping out 50 million gallons of water from a flooded mine shaft, drilling a 240 foot escape shaft through ground that included 150 feet of rock, and assessing numerous scenarios and providing for contingencies, such as rescue officials adding U.S. Navy personnel with their nine hyperbaric decompression chambers to the rescue effort. Time could not be wasted in deliberations. The rescue had to be done quickly in the face of a ticking clock with nine lives hanging in the balance.

Twelve hours after the rushing water had blocked their exit, a six-inch pipe broke through, carrying warm air and the hope of rescue to the trapped miners. Late Saturday evening, at 10:16 p.m., the drill bit boring the shaft for the escape capsule that would carry the nine miners to the surface finally broke through. The first miner emerged from the rescue capsule at 1:00 a.m. and on Sunday, July 28<sup>th</sup> at 2:45 a.m., the ninth miner reached the surface — all, remarkably, were alive and safe.