

# Sightless Mechanic Not Blind to the Good Times



Cynthia Scanlon.

Ray Rovey.

PHOENIX — Ray Rovey is extremely busy these days. He is a self-employed mechanic. He is a volunteer with the Diver's Posse of the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office. And, for recreation, he scuba dives, hikes the Grand Canyon and water-skis.

Ray Rovey is also blind.

"I joined the sheriff's posse five years ago," says the 44-year-old Rovey, a Phoenix resi-

dent. "I went through an extended probationary period with them to prove that I could dive and there would be no problem. Now, I'm accepted as one of the divers.

Rovey says the majority of the posse's time is spent recovering drowning victims and salvage. "One year, we pulled about seven pickups and numerous boat trailers out of the water," he says. "The drivers would get out and forget to leave the thing in gear or the brake would come off. It would roll down into the water and disappear."

Rovey, who has been a certified diver for 20 years, has participated in more than two dozen searches. He is restricted from diving in the Salt River and in some of the canals because of the swiftness of the water.

"The majority of our diving is in what we call black water," he says. "We have no visibility at all. We work off of lines and buoys.

"We've had problems with people getting into that black water and not being able to handle it. But I'm always in that type of environment, so I don't have the hesitancy or claustrophobia."

Rovey was born with congenital cataracts that got worse as he got older. He lost sight in his left eye in 1968 and in his right eye in 1975.

Rovey's repair business consists mainly of agricultural and industrial equipment. But having once worked as an airplane mechanic for three major airlines — all while he was blind — there's not much that Rovey is unable to fix. "There are certain things I can't do," he says. "Then, I have to have someone help me. But 95 percent of it I can do myself.

"Sometimes, it takes a while to figure out a way to do it. It may not be the conventional way, but there's a way to get around it. I've had to make some specialized tools, but I do things mostly by feel."

For the majority of sighted people, going blind is a frightening prospect. But Rovey says he is afraid of little. "Heights don't bother me now," he says. "They bothered me when I could see. We worked high upon the tails of airplanes, and that was frightening. I'll try something and sometimes I can't do it. But I'm not afraid to try."

When hiking the Grand Canyon, Rovey uses a cane, as well as a rope attached to a friend who leads the way. "When I hiked down the Havasupai Trail in the Grand Canyon last fall with a friend, we determined that it was best for each of us to have a walking cane," Rovey says. "He would tap a rock and let me know where it was."

Rovey also has been an avid water-skier for many years. When he lost his sight, though, his love for the sport didn't diminish. Says Rovey: "It's just a matter of following the boat."

— Cynthia Scanlon