

More Than Just a Life Saved

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CPR and on getting a good airway until the ambulance arrived,” says Chief Kaczinski.

For those unfamiliar with the EMS system, there are several levels of training and certification in Oregon. First Responders can be trained though a one day First Aid and CPR class. To become certified as an Basic EMT, Advanced EMT, or Intermediate EMT, more rigorous educational training is required. Paramedic is the highest level of training in Emergency Medicine. Mist-Birkenfeld RFPD utilizes an additional level of training called Emergency Medical Response (EMR), a 60-hour course which is a cross between First Aid/CPR training and EMT-Basic courses.

It’s no accident that the Mist-Birkenfeld RFPD volunteers and staff were well prepared and performed so well under immense pressure during this emergency, says Chief Paramedic Boxman, who started teaching the EMR training in the District when he became a full-time paramedic two years ago.

He says the EMR class has an adaptable curriculum that can be tailored to emphasize and meet the specific needs of rural communities.

“We train. We do the EMR class. We train every week and we repeat these training exercises every week, over and over again, so when we actually get into a situation like this they just know what to do and can work together as a team,” says Boxman. “We work hard to build not just their confidence, but their competence, so they feel comfortable showing up on calls and are able to do the right things.”

LeeKwai had gone through that course, and when he graduated he, like all Mist-Birkenfeld RFPD volunteers, was given a kit to keep in his vehicle so he can respond to emergencies quickly. That kit contains all the things needed to start resuscitation. “We’re able to train to have quick interventions for our rural, more frontier type of community,” says Boxman, who was one of two paramedics who responded to Yeck’s emergency. “Max had the training, he had the equipment, and he jumped right in and used all those tools to sustain Tyson’s life until we could get there with the ambulance and defibrillator.”

LeeKwai, who works in sales for Stimson Lumber, had to put all his training into action to save the life of a close friend. He says he was unsure whether it was going to turn out to be one of the worst days of his

life, or one of the best. “I was on a razor’s edge,” he remembers. “The shock of this being a close friend might have inhibited my ability to perform. But because of our training – going on calls, constantly drilling, working together – the training completely took over and got the job done. I know for a fact that without that training this would not have ended well.”

When the ambulance arrived, the crew hooked Tyson up to the AED defibrillator and provided two life saving shocks. “We were able to deliver a shock that immediately converted his heart to a life sustaining rhythm,” explains Boxman. “It wasn’t the best rhythm, but we were able to work with that rhythm and get him into a position that was life sustaining.” The crew later delivered a second shock which helped stabilize Yeck even more.

“We couldn’t have done our jobs without them having the knowledge and training to assist us and knowing what to do and help us be successful,” said Boxman about the performance of the volunteers assisting with the call. “They just did a phenomenal job. There’s an old saying in the EMS business, ‘Paramedics save lives, EMTs save paramedics,’ and that is very, very true.”

Meanwhile, Life Flight was activated to ensure quick transit to a medical facility and longtime Mist-Birkenfeld RFPD volunteer Nick Berg was sent to establish a landing zone nearby. Max and Tyson’s friends, wanting desperately to help in some way, used spray paint they had on hand for their sporting activities to paint a large “H” on the grass. “The helicopter landed right on the H,” says Chief Kaczinski.

Yeck was flown to Providence St. Vincent Medical Center in Beaverton, known for having one of the best cardiovascular teams in the region, where he would spend the next eight days before heading home with his family.

Because their patient was a friend of one of their volunteers, the staff at Mist-Birkenfeld RFPD were able to track Yeck’s recovery. “We usually don’t get a lot of updates on what happens after we turn over a patient at the hospital,” says Chief Kaczinski. “We might call the hospital, and they can give us a little bit of information because of patient confidentiality. But Max was able to send us photos of Tyson in the hospital when he woke up and with his family. It really became more personalized

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From the Editor



I recently bumped into my good friend Charlie at Hawkins Park. He and I spent part of the evening goofing around on the play structure there – climbing up and sliding down.

Eventually I was worn out and told Charlie I was tired and needed to stop playing. Charlie was disappointed but understanding. He did beat me in a race back to the other side of the park.

This might be a good time to mention that my friend Charlie just turned five and is still in preschool.

Charlie’s parents are friends of ours and he occasionally spends a few hours at our house when his mom needs a break or needs to get some work done.

I don’t think Charlie’s parents would be offended if I described Charlie as a precocious kid. Charlie is both smart and observant, and he often surprises me with his broad vocabulary. Recently, when he comes across something unusual his new favorite saying is, “That’s ridiculous!” He’s full of wisecracks like that.

Charlie also has a great sense of humor, but I was still a bit surprised when he stopped me before I left Hawkins Park the other evening because he had something he wanted to tell me. “I know you’re tired, and I know you do the news, but I wanted to tell you, THE NEWS NEVER

SLEEPS!” And then he walked away leaving me somewhat dumbfounded, but smiling. That kid is funny!

Where he got this phrase, I’m not sure, and it didn’t seem his parents knew either.

Why am I telling you all this? Well, it’s certainly not to pat myself on the back and tell you about how hard I work chasing down the news. Believe me, there are plenty of people around Vernonia who work harder than me – teachers, our local firefighters and ambulance crews, service workers, local law enforcement (a special shout out to Sergeant Shawn Carnahan for his continued dedication to this community!). And there are a lot of volunteers who give more than their share of time to make this community great – a big thank you to everyone who made this year’s Salmon Festival great!

No, I just thought this was a funny story and a great reminder to not take ourselves too seriously. Things are hard right now and a lot of people are struggling. At times like this it’s easy to overlook the simple things, the things that make us smile, the joy that a funny kid or a cute pet can bring us.

So this is just reminder – take some time to play, be silly, and try to enjoy your day!

Scott Laird

Editor and Publisher

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