



PHOTO BY DIEGO DIAZ
 Jim Serrill, also known as Timber Jim, stands in the Hilltop Community Garden, a project that he championed at the Tualatin United Methodist Church.

The ethos of Timber Jim

BY EMILY GREEN
 STAFF WRITER

Despite the occasionally pilfered vegetable, Jim Serrill refuses to build a fence around his community garden.

The garden, he said, is there for anyone who needs it.

Ask people who know him, and they'll say the same is true of Serrill.

Serrill is best known among soccer fans as Timber Jim, the Portland Timbers' former chainsaw-wielding mascot, but for those who cross his path these days, he's nothing short of a hero.

"A lot of men his age play golf, go fishing and do a lot of self-absorbed things," said his friend, Dale Montgomery. "He does community projects – not just out of a sense of duty that he has, but he does it because he loves people and he wants to help."

On April 9, Serrill will share his ethos, "spread the love," when he gives a TED talk at Keller Auditorium in Portland.

Timber Jim originated in 1978 after Serrill asked Portland Timbers' management if he could bring a chainsaw to matches. Reluctantly, they agreed. He soon added a bass drum, a zip line and other sky-high feats. He was the first to lead the crowd in chants and song, a tradition that

Through tragedy, Jim Serrill discovered he had a lot of love to give. That will be the subject of his TED talk.

holds steady today. Instantly, he was a hit.

Following in the footsteps of his father, he was a "tree man," he said. He worked in the timber industry and trimmed trees around power lines for Portland General Electric.

Hanging from rafters and scaling an 80-foot spar pole during soccer matches came naturally to Serrill.

Timber Jim officially retired as mascot in 2008, passing the chainsaw to Timber Joey.

It was after his family suffered an unimaginable tragedy that Serrill came to fully understand how much love he had to give.

He was performing for fans at a Portland Timbers match in 2004 when his daughter Hannah, the youngest of three, was killed in a car accident.

Her boyfriend, the father of her 2-year-old, fell asleep at the wheel. Hannah was in

the passenger seat, sleeping in a reclined position, which caused the seatbelt to catch her neck. Everyone else involved in the collision survived.

Hannah was 17.

"I've been teaching safety my entire career," Serrill said. "I taught hundreds of

guys how to make a living and keep from killing themselves on a power line, but I wasn't able to get the message to her."

Twelve years after the accident, the moment Serrill begins to utter Hannah's name, his soft blue eyes begin to brim with tears.

"I was destroyed. Had to quit my job. Couldn't do power

line work anymore. Couldn't keep it together. I was just so depressed. But all my guys at work – they carried me," he said. "That kind of love really made it so we – my wife, Diana, and I – could cope with it.

"I wanted to give back."

IF YOU GO

What: TEDxPortland 2016

When: 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. April 9

Where: Keller Auditorium, 222 SW Clay St.

Tickets: \$100

Other speakers include Street Roots Director Israel Bayer, Camions of Care Director Nadya Okamoto, former Oregon Ducks quarterback Joey Harrington and 11-year-old performer Bobbi MacKenzie.

See **TIMBER JIM**, page 5