

Keizer mom pulls double duty as ICU nurse, volunteer firefighter

By Jenenne Aguilar
Special to Keizertimes

Keizer native Amber Butler, 38, has dedicated her life to helping others. It's in her blood—her father and grandfather were both firefighters.

"It was a natural thing for me to grow into with my family history," said Butler.

Amber became a volunteer firefighter with Keizer Fire District in 1995, one year after she graduated from high school. That same year she met her now husband, Capt. Brian Butler, a career firefighter also with Keizer Fire.

"I had to make a decision for my career," said Amber. "I chose to become a nurse because it would be easier to have a nurse-paramedic relationship. Plus, I wanted to be a mom too."

Butler worked full-time for more than seven years at Salem Hospital, starting in the pharmacy and then transferring to the ER for six years.

Amber then started nursing classes and graduated in

2003 from the Chemeketa Community College nursing program. She became a nurse in the hospital's Intensive Care Unit.

"I most often interact with families because the patients are usually sedated or can't interact due to their medical condition," said Butler. "My goal is to bring the family's anxiety down to a manageable level, help them understand what's going on, and provide excellent care."

Amber has also worked with the hospital's Rapid Response Team for the past nine years, responding to patient emergencies, such as chest pain or breathing problems.

Balancing a nursing career with family life poses a weekly challenge, with a daughter and son, ages 8 and 6.

She works two, 12-hour shifts each week as a nurse—with her husband away at the fire station another two to three days. That leaves two days for family time.

"I still fill in with Keizer Fire where it works for my family's schedule. It's always cram-packed," said Butler.



Amber Butler in her turnout gear as a volunteer with Keizer Fire District.

Submitted

"My family always comes first. But I have a passion to volunteer and be there for the community."

She also has discovered another passion.

"Ten years ago, I heard about a ridiculous firefighter challenge where you climb 69 flights of stairs wearing 60 pounds of gear. At the time I thought you're out of your mind," said Butler.

In 2011, Amber participated for her first time in the Scott Firefighter Stairclimb

at the Columbia Center in downtown Seattle—a fundraiser for the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society.

A close friend of hers died from leukemia and a colleague was diagnosed with multiple myeloma, providing further inspiration.

Amber made it to the top in 32 minutes and 19 seconds.

"The challenge is unbelievable. You feel worn out and exhausted at the top. But it's less than 35 minutes of

feeling that way," said Butler. "Those going through treatment feel that way daily."

This spring, she raised nearly \$7,000 for the event—topping her 2014 effort by more than \$2,000. Some 1,900 firefighters from around the world participated and altogether raised \$2.2 million. The event's motto: Climb. Conquer. Cure.

"It's beautiful to raise money for a great organization. It goes straight to blood-cancer research and patient services," said Butler.

Amber revealed what matters to her most—"I want to be a positive role model for my kids—plus provide a positive experience for patients and their families at the hospital or those at a fire scene," said Butler.

"My kids know mommy does these things because it makes me feel happy to help others—and hopefully they see value for why I do it."

Jenenne Aguilar is the trauma program nurse manager at Salem Hospital, a part of Salem Health. Find more information at salemhealth.org.

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Library hosts summer stories

The Keizer Community Library Story Time has started.

It's being held at the library, located in the Keizer Heritage Center at 980 Chemawa Road NE and runs from 11 a.m. to noon on Thursdays.

It's oriented to readers 7 years old or younger and includes stories and activities. You do not have to be a library patron to participate. Children must be accompanied by an adult.

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