

60 year old Shirlee Ann Fund still important for community

Captain Eric Pedersen
Station 22

Fire stations are an important part of any community but Station 22 and the community we serve have a special relationship not usually seen outside of rural areas or small towns. A large part of this history stems from the efforts created out of a tragedy that occurred 60 years ago. Some of you have been a part of this effort at some point or remember hearing the name Shirlee Ann. Many of you, though, are new to our growing and changing neighborhood and don't yet know what happened when a determined group decided to come together and start a legacy that continues to save lives.

In the 1950's, fire departments were just starting to look at providing more than fire suppression. Equipment and training for medical emergencies was hard to come by even in a larger city like Portland. Police, fire, and ambulances responded to many serious medical events and did as much as they could but had few options to provide assistance. Portland Fire & Rescue had one oxygen powered respirator located downtown at Fire Station #1, too far away to help many who needed it.

On January 2, 1955, at 8547 N. Tyler Avenue, 11 month-old Shirlee Ann Howell began choking on a grape. Her parents took her to the St. Johns

police station for help. The police called for the firefighters at Station 22 for assistance but, without proper medical equipment, the firefighters and police could only try to rush her to Emanuel hospital in a police car. Shirlee Ann died before they could get her to the emergency room. The firefighters were convinced that a respirator device could have saved her life.

Mr. & Mrs. Howell and Mrs. Victor VanAlstine along with other St. Johns residents started an effort to raise the \$800 to purchase a respirator for Fire Station 22 so that Shirlee Ann's death would not be in vain and that other lives might be saved. Fire Chief Boatright, Portland Commissioner Stanley Earl, and many others vowed support for the new Shirlee Ann Fund. A January 20, 1955 article in the St. Johns Review detailed the need for medical equipment and announced the fundraising effort. The community response over the next six months was tremendous. Donations were received from individuals, businesses, social clubs, PTA's, trade unions, and many other organizations. A benefit talent show was held at James John School with singers and dancers performing. The Peninsula St. Johns Merchants Committee donated a percentage of their profits on May 6 to the Shirlee Ann Fund.

By the summer of 1955, the account had soared to \$3791.00. Due to the overwhelming support from the community, the Fund was able to purchase not only the respirator but a fully outfitted first aid response vehicle for Station 22. On January 28, 1956 a dedication ceremony was held at Station 22 and at 6:30 pm the new rescue car, christened the "Shirlee Ann", paraded up Germantown Road to the Skyline Legion Hall with lights and sirens blaring. For the next 47 years, a first aid response vehicle was staffed and stationed at Station 22 to respond to any medical emergency.

Since that initial beginning, the St. Johns area has continued to support Station 22 through the Shirlee Ann Fund with equipment and training not available through the city budget. When Rescue 22 was able to be staffed with Paramedic level firefighters, the Shirlee Ann Fund donated training material, advanced medical equipment, and a state of the art portable defibrillator to ensure the highest level of care was available. In 2002, staffing changes and budget concerns forced the retirement of a dedicated first aid response vehicle at Station 22. By this time, Engine 22 and Truck 22 were both staffed with Paramedic firefighters with advanced equipment and were able to deliver needed interventions when needed.

The transition in the fire service to a higher level of emergency medical care in the 1980's and 1990's allowed the focus of the Shirlee Ann Fund to shift to other emergency response

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Early vehicles of the Shirlee Ann Fund courtesy the Portland Fire Bureau.



needs of this unique part of Portland. The city's first "Jaws of Life" hydraulic tool for extricating victims of car crashes was purchased by the Fund. In 1993, the Fund donated a full complement of rope rescue equipment for high-angle rope rescues. In 1995, the first hand-held Thermal Imaging Camera (TIC) used in Portland was donated to Station 22. The TIC allows firefighters to see through the thickest smoke to locate fire victims or pinpoint the fire location in zero visibility. In 2002, a Zodiac rescue boat was purchased to provide water rescue capability on the rivers and inland waterways. In 2004, in conjunction with Oregon Steel Mills, 2 ATV's were purchased for wildland fire response in Forest Park and other areas. The ATV's are also used extensively for rapid medical response during parades, Bridge Pedal, marathons, and other large scale events. Multiple lives have been saved with the ATV's during these events because of their speed, mobility, and ability to carry all of the necessary advanced medical equipment. The Fund also purchased a small trailer in 2013 that allows us to transport patients and larger loads with the ATV's.

to have this tremendous local support and are proud to serve St. Johns and the surrounding neighborhoods. The success and impact of the Shirlee Ann Fund that began in tragedy many years ago is a testament to the spirit and tenacity of the residents of this area. Over the last 60 years, a large number of people have spent countless hours with little or no recognition to preserve Shirlee Ann Howells' legacy. Many more of you didn't know this unique organization was such a special part of our community and that it is still actively helping to save lives today. The Shirlee Ann Fund is overseen by a committee of six local residents and business owners. Any requests for funding from Station 22 are evaluated and authorized by this committee with the primary mission of providing enhanced emergency response to the citizens of St. Johns. For more information about how you can support the Shirlee Ann Fund, correspondence can be sent to: Shirlee Ann Fund, PO Box 83826, Portland OR 97283

Pictures Below are Port. Fire & Rescue training pictures



All photos in this article are courtesy of the Portland Fire Bureau



Photo of the Week

Left: This photo by Manuel Entrambasaguas, was selected because it shows the magnificence of the bridge spires with the looming, foggy hills behind. Spectacular. If you have a picture you'd like to send to the Review to be entered into the **St. Johns Bridge Photo Contest**, send them ASAP via email to: reviewnewspaper@gmail.com. A winner will be selected in November 2015 and the prize is \$100 cash. **Send in high resolution, jpeg format. See more contest info on Page 2 of this issue.**

Photo: Manuel Entrambasaguas

Manuel's Photo.