

Duo: Both entered military in 2009

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Though now it feels routine, waking up in the middle of the night to respond to a car accident or house fire together wasn't exactly what the two envisioned as their life together when they started dating 11 years ago. But after both TJ and Shaunna served a tour in the U.S. Marine Corps, firefighting began to play a critical role in easing them back into the community they called home.

In fact, 11 years ago, Shaunna envisioned the exact opposite.

"I actually swore I'd never get into the fire industry," Shaunna said. Growing up, her mom worked for Medix in emergency medicine in Seaside, and she said she became irritated with her working long hours at strange times of day.

"I hated the sound of that pager going off," Shaunna said.

But this irritation wasn't enough to dissuade the crush she developed for TJ when she was 14, who at the time was a volunteer firefighter and her sister's best friend.

To help move the relationship, her sister suggested she ask TJ to help her fix the radio in the car she just purchased at 16. One thing led to another, and suddenly she found herself loving another first responder.

Unique challenges

While it's not uncommon for couples to be in the same business, some things get more complicated when the business is saving lives.

"It's one thing when you're risking your own life," TJ said. "But it's different when it involves people you love. Potentially sending my wife into a structure fire is a little bit of a tall order, but it's a job that has to be done."

That personal connection is a benefit, too, TJ said. The two have an immense trust and respect for the other's abilities and judgments. They rarely have to communicate because both know what needs to be done and how.

"When we get done with a call, we both experienced all the same stuff," TJ said. "Because of privacy issues, we can't talk about our work with people who weren't there. But since we both were there, we can help each other process. You see some terrible things sometimes."

It's a lifestyle and understanding the two developed while serving in the Marine Corps. Both entered the military in 2009 — TJ after volunteering with Cannon Beach Fire and Rescue for seven



Photos by Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian
Cannon Beach volunteer firefighter Shaunna White, right holding onto car door, participates in a training exercise last week. More photos online at DailyAstorian.com



Cannon Beach volunteer firefighter Shaunna White, far right, watches over a vehicle-extrication training exercise last week.

years and Shaunna right out of high school.

TJ was inspired by his father, who served as a police officer in Cannon Beach. Serving his country was a way to help replicate the safe, simple childhood he got to experience in Cannon Beach, TJ said.

When the fire department threw a going-away party for TJ at the Driftwood, one of the wives asked him why he was joining the service. "I pointed back at my team, and said, 'That's why' — to make sure people could continue to do whatever they want to do without fear of something else."

"Wow," Shaunna said. "That's a beautiful story. I just didn't want to go to college. And I wanted to be a Marine."

"So basically you were more scared of college than going into combat?" TJ asked.

"Yeah, I guess so," Shaunna laughed.

Strong, unstoppable

For Shaunna, it was her grandfather — a veteran of both the Korean and Vietnam wars — that inspired her to enlist. Being a Marine meant being strong, being unstoppable. It meant success.

"So when I finally got in,

I remember asking, 'Can I be a tanker?' and they said that was for only men. I asked to be a grunt, and again, only men," Shaunna said. "I could be a cook or a tactical switchboard operator, so I chose the last one."

The two separated for 11 months for training before TJ managed to transfer near Camp Pendleton in California, where Shaunna was stationed. A year-and-a-half in, they were married, which allowed them to stay together throughout their tours.

"It put a tremendous stress on our relationship," TJ said. "It's a lifestyle that's hard to understand if you're not in it."

After living in a world where 4 a.m. runs and six-hour packing trips in the beating sun are status quo, both TJ and Shaunna found something missing in their lives when returning to the civilian world.

"The Marine Corps made me feel unstoppable. It made me who I am today, instead of college. I had this overall important mission. Only 6 percent of Marines are female," Shaunna said. "So when I got out, I felt like I was nothing, insignificant. It made me depressed."

That's when TJ convinced

her to try firefighting with him, to help recreate the structure and team atmosphere of the military.

"It doesn't necessarily make the transition easier, but it will help you give a direction to feel like you are doing something, instead of hanging up your uniform and remembering the good old days. That's hard."

Into the future

One of the largest benefits in veterans who serve as volunteer firefighters is an innate sense of responsibility, work ethic and respect.

"They understand structure, and that is critical. They will fall back on their military background in a major incident," Benedict said.

For the past year, Benedict has seen veterans, such as Shaunna and TJ, transition and grow more comfortable with the job.

"It's important to keep their minds busy, and we give them an opportunity to do that," Benedict said.

Shaunna is pursuing her fire-science degree at Clatsop Community College with the hopes of making firefighting her career. TJ is pursuing a degree in psychology at Oregon State University while working as a phlebotomist at Providence Seaside Hospital in the hopes of becoming a physician's assistant in emergency medicine.

What type of first responder work and where are to be determined for TJ and Shaunna's future, but no matter what, they are committed to keeping Cannon Beach safe.

"When I left the military, I missed the challenge," Shaunna said. "It took me awhile to get here, but I fell in love."



Gov. Kate Brown held a ceremonial signing ceremony Friday in Salem for new laws to help the mentally ill.

Submitted Photo

New laws: Tragedies have drawn attention to treatment gaps

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and potential barriers in carrying out the law.

Another new law signed by Brown this month requires public and private health insurers to cover behavioral health assessments and medically necessary treatment for people in mental health crisis, a mechanism to help finance care.

"These bills ensure that when Oregonians reach out for help in a behavioral health crisis, they can access a broad range of mental health professionals, emergency services and critical support systems," Brown said in a statement Friday after a ceremonial signing in Salem with advocates for the mentally ill. "Now, Oregonians in their most vulnerable moments will have the tools they need to recover, without undue financial burden."

Crisis response

Columbia Memorial and Providence Seaside work with Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare — Clatsop County's mental health contractor — on crisis response to the mentally ill. A crisis respite center that opened last summer in Warrenton is also intended as an alternative to emergency rooms or, in more severe circumstances, the county jail. The hospitals are a partner in the crisis respite center.

"CMH has been following this practice already and we are glad to have the state make this the standard policy for everyone," Trece Gurrad, the vice president of patient care services at Columbia Memorial, said of the emergency room protocol in an email.

Janiece Zauner, the chief operating officer and chief nursing officer at Providence Seaside, said in an email that "we are working on developing innovative, sustainable solutions that actively engage community resources to meet the needs developed in these policies. We are beginning the work in each ministry this summer, and hope to have community-based solutions identified later this fall, before the legislation takes effect."

"Caring for patients with behavioral health needs is a priority, and we will be working on how best to implement targeted strategies in support of people in need."

Tragedies

Social workers, police officers and prosecutors who regularly encounter the mentally ill recognize the challenge for emergency room doctors and nurses. But some have observed that hospitals at times seem unprepared to handle people in a behavioral health crisis and unable to link patients to treatment.

Tragedies, like the suicide of Carrie Barnhart, who jumped from the Astoria Bridge in 2015 after several interactions with police, Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare and Columbia Memorial involving her schizophrenia and depression, have drawn attention to treatment gaps. Barnhart's family has filed

a \$950,000 lawsuit against Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare and Columbia Memorial alleging negligence.

Another suicide — Susanna Gabay's Vicodin overdose in 2010 — inspired state action. The 21-year-old University of Oregon student from Mosier, who struggled with depression, had a psychotic breakdown and was placed in a hospital psychiatric unit on suicide watch. She killed herself just before a counseling appointment a month after her discharge.

Her parents, Jerry and Susan Gabay, said the hospital did not disclose their daughter was on suicide watch and told them she may — or may not — have another psychotic episode, not enough information to alert them of suicide risk.

The 2015 law that set a protocol for hospitals when discharging mentally ill patients also clarified medical privacy to help avoid leaving loved ones in the dark. Patients are encouraged to authorize hospitals to disclose information to caregivers, such as prescribed medications and behavioral warning signs that demand immediate medical help.

Follow-up appointments must be scheduled within seven days after discharge, or hospitals must document why the seven-day goal is not possible.

The law was named the Susanna Blake Gabay Act.

Jerry Gabay, who now serves on the board of the National Alliance on Mental Illness-Oregon, said he and his wife learned that medical providers are reluctant to talk with families about mental health "in a way that would be shocking if you came in with a broken hip."

Research

New research released in April found that suicide risk among emergency room patients in mental health crisis is reduced if they receive suicide screening from an emergency room doctor, guidance on treatment options when they are released and follow-up phone calls. The study, led by Ivan Miller, a professor of psychiatry and human behavior at Brown University in Rhode Island, showed a 30 percent decline in suicide attempts over a 52-week follow-up period.

"It's very important, particularly with people in a fragile mental state, and super important if they may be suicidal, to want to have done an adequate assessment of their mental health condition, which is not always done. And in my personal experience, with my daughter, it was not done, when I was there anyway," Gabay said.

"So you need to have an adequate assessment of what is the problem here. And then don't just release them and say, 'Hey, good luck.' Give them a little bit of a transition. Have some plan about what you're going to do. Make an appointment for them to see somebody."

Warrenton: Epicenter of housing development

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withdraw the biological opinion, and for FEMA to suspend implementation of new flood plain development rules until after a public rule-making process and a review under the National Environmental Policy Act.

"These proposed rules would undo decades of urban growth management and natural resource protection," Jon Chandler, CEO of the Oregon Home Builders Association and president of Oregonians for Floodplain Protection, said in a release announcing the lawsuit. "And they would result in millions of dollars of economic loss and expense for Oregon property owners and local governments, not to mention years of uncertainty."



Alex Pajunas/The Daily Astorian
Warrenton has struggled with flood insurance and levee certification issues.

The coalition includes several trade groups representing homebuilders, Realtors, farmers and the construction industry, along with individual landowners and several county and city governments,

including Warrenton.

Warrenton Mayor Henry Balensifer said the city, which has taken multiple hits regarding flood insurance and levee certification, felt the need to join the coalition to make sure

its voice was heard. The city paid \$500 to be a part of the coalition but is not helping finance the litigation.

"I can understand the scientific basis for protecting or enhancing ecology, but it's not taking into consideration the human aspect," Balensifer said.

Warrenton has become the epicenter of new housing development amid a housing shortage. But much of the city's lands are low-lying and considered at risk from a 100-year flood, which can restrict development and significantly increase flood insurance rates.

"We want to make sure we're protecting the future of our town, in terms of being able to provide spaces for housing and encouraging development in our city," Balensifer said.

Vanderpool: Gearhart resident started volunteering in November 2015

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Instead, Vanderpool tries to snap photos when the dogs are more playful and in front of better scenery, such as a tree in the shelter backyard.

A welcome sight

When Vanderpool walks through the doors each day at about noon, the kenneled dogs — sensing an upcoming

trek outside — burst with enthusiasm.

Vanderpool employs a number of techniques to improve their behavior as she walks or plays with them. For starters, she's mindful of her own temperament.

"If I'm getting nervous and I'm not patient, the dog will catch on," she said.

In the shelter backyard, she sometimes helps other volun-

teers teach the dogs tricks or correct behavioral issues.

One exercise involves her and a leashed dog walking toward a pile of toys. If the pup becomes too hyper along the way, she shortens the leash. If it misbehaves too much, she may turn around, go back to the starting point and walk the dog toward the area again. She repeats the process until the dog calms down.

Later when a potential adopter meets a dog, she discusses its background with them to make sure the pet is the right fit.

Volunteer honors

Vanderpool, 29, of Gearhart, has been volunteering at the shelter since November 2015, soon after her family moved from Portland. Since then, she said she's become more com-

fortable handling dogs with behavioral issues.

Animal Shelter Supervisor Stephen Hildreth presented Vanderpool with a volunteer award at a county Board of Commissioners meeting in April.

"She is a dedicated young lady," he said. "She sometimes is the only one out there in the downpouring rain or the windy storms walking the dogs."

Lengthy commute times

meant Vanderpool was unable to volunteer at a shelter in Portland, and she hasn't lived with a dog since she was a young girl. Her move to the county allowed her to volunteer regularly, and she said she has no plans to stop in the near future.

"I just really like helping," she said. "I really like coming here and walking with them and interacting."

— Jack Heffernan