

Changing of the Guard

Air Life's longtime leader hands the reins to another of the industry's most respected program directors

Vern Bartley bids farewell after 20 years with Air Life



A much younger Vern Bartley shows a little leg in this 1988 photo taken just three years after Air Life began.

When Vern Bartley became the program director for Air Life of Oregon, Ronald Reagan was president, a postage stamp cost 20-cents, and no one knew for sure if an air ambulance service would survive east of the Cascades. Twenty years later, Air Life is one of the most successful air ambulance programs in the industry — a fact that gives Vern something to smile about as he prepares to retire May 1.

"We've come a long way in 20 years," he said. "It's been incredible watching this program grow from only one half-time flight nurse, three pilots and a mechanic to a program with 80 employees and a budget of \$20 million."

In 1985, Vern's career as a firefighter/paramedic took a new turn when a committee he belonged to studied the reasons morbidity and mortality rates were 2.5 times higher for patients east of the Cascades. Long transport times were a culprit, and Vern wanted to help change that. When St. Charles Medical Center approved Air Life and placed Vern at the helm, they gave it three years to become self-sustaining. If it didn't, they'd close it down. "I would have sold liver on a stick if I thought it would have made this

program a success," he said.

But the liver wasn't necessary, and Air Life became the first helicopter-based air ambulance service in the nation to successfully implement a

membership program. It's a feat Vern ranks as one of the program's greatest achievements. "I'm also very proud of our patient care—no question—but I'm especially proud of the quality of people we've been able to attract and keep."

And now, those quality people are preparing to say farewell to their beloved

leader. "Vern has been a great mentor for me," said Audra Ferrera-Green, Air Life's membership clerk for the last nine years. "He has a fun personality, and working with him has been very rewarding. I'm really going to miss him."



Halloween 2002, the office proves to Vern that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.

Air Life says goodbye to Tina Diehl after 13 years of service

When Tina Diehl became Air Life's database coordinator in April 1991, there were 8,500 member households. Today, there are over 30,000. But Tina kept up with the frantic workload, becoming one of Air Life's greatest assets over the years. In addition to her role as database coordinator, Tina also served as Air Life's office manager for nearly six years. "I've enjoyed the fast pace," said Tina, who recently relocated to Salem for her husband's job change. "Something different happens every day."

Left: Tina Diehl in her last week on the job. Right: Tina Diehl with Vern Bartley in 1992.



Michael Greene proudly joins the Air Life team

Air Life of Oregon's new program director already has his head in the clouds — but really, that's a good thing. During his first few weeks on the job, Michael Greene was eager to climb aboard the Air Life helicopter to get a feel for the team he's now managing.

With more than two decades of work in the medical arena, Michael is no stranger to flying with an air ambulance crew. Formerly a flight nurse with Air Life-HealthOne in Denver, Michael continued flying even after he became the program director there in 1993. "It really kept me connected with the crews and kept me aware of what was going on in the community," he said. "It's a part of the job I've really enjoyed. There's a lot of satisfaction in patient care."

Michael's selection as the new program director for Air Life of Oregon came at the end of an extensive, nationwide search. For Vern Bartley — who is retiring from the role after 20 years — hiring Michael Greene was the best decision the program could have made.

"When I first sat down with a book of all the AAMS [American Association of Air



Air Life's new program director, Michael Greene (above) with wife Julieanne Moratti-Greene, and (right) giving an educational presentation for Air Life-HealthOne in Denver.



Medical Services] programs in the nation thinking 'who can we get?' Michael's name jumped out at me," Vern said. "He was the top candidate in the nation, and he'll do an excellent job for us."

Michael was named Program Director of the Year in 2003 by the Association of Air Medical Services — a prestigious, national award that Vern earned in 1997. "It's very reassuring to know our new director has twelve years experience directing a similar air ambulance company," said Wanda Grindstaff, Air Life's membership coordinator. "As an added plus, his experience extends to the same aviation vendor that we contract to perform all our aircraft services. We're

excited to have Michael join us."

Admittedly thrilled with his move from Denver to Bend, Michael is equally excited to take the reins of a program he's admired from a distance for many years. "Air Life has done a stellar job with membership and with giving the community a sense of ownership with the program," he said. "I plan to immerse myself in the program and get to know the people and the processes."

Michael has two children — an 11-year-old daughter, Taylor, and a three-year-old son, Hunter. His wife, Julieanne, is a nurse practitioner who previously worked as a flight nurse.