

'The gift of life'

Cresson, Benbrook first responders awarded for lifesaving role in multi-organ donation

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Not all lives can be saved — but for a few local first responders, they were able to witness firsthand how sometimes the worst tragedies can turn out to be the biggest blessings.

Members of the Cresson Volunteer Fire Department and Benbrook EMS were recognized April 3 by the Chisholm Trail 100 Club at the Diana Jones Memorial Training Center in Cresson for their lifesaving efforts that turned one tragedy into four miracles.

According to an award recommendation by Cresson Fire Chief Ron Becker, first responders were dispatched on an EMS call on the shores of Lake Benbrook earlier this year. The call stated there was an unconscious person found in a vehicle.

As units were responding, deputies from the Tarrant County Sheriff's Department located the vehicle and were unable to arouse the occupant.

CVFD units arrived first at the location and found the patient had significant trauma but was still breathing.

This information was immediately relayed to the responding Benbrook EMS unit, and the decision was made to immediately launch air medical.

Cresson paramedics Richard Ward and Traci Becker were assisted by Cresson EMT Valerie Steen and firefighters Ethan Merrick and Cooper Waindel as the five began to remove the patient from the vehicle

and started assisting the patient's ventilations.

Benbrook EMS then arrived with paramedics David Harold, Matthew Borchardt and Matthew Bridges, as all five paramedics and Cresson firefighters worked together to move the patient into the Benbrook ambulance. First responders were then able to successfully intubate the patient and continue ventilations.

Cresson paramedics Ward and Becker, along with Cresson EMT Steen and Chief Becker directed other arriving Cresson firefighters Matthew Vaughn, Aydan Hockett, Jonathan Davis and Blake Martin to position their apparatus to create a secure landing zone for the incoming Careflight helicopter in the dark, unit location.

"Those of you who don't know, these landing zones out on the edge of the lake in the dark, that's a little bit on the dangerous side," Becker said. "All you gotta do is watch some news (and see) how many of these medical transport helicopters are having trouble these days."

Becker explained the patient was moved to the helicopter while ventilation continued and was then transported to a Level I trauma hospital.

Two days later — just over 42 hours after the two departments were dispatched — the patient was pronounced deceased.

While Becker noted the patient was "artificially kept alive," for those 42 hours, they were also an organ donor.

"The right arrangements

were made with the next of kin, and both of the lungs, liver and kidneys were recovered for transplant," Becker said. "As a result of the work of these crews that were out there keeping this patient artificially alive, a 67-year-old female received a lung transplant, the liver went to a 49-year-old male, the right kidney went to a 65-year-old female and the left kidney to a 74-year-old female."

Becker noted the Lifegift Donation System Specialist also commented, "Please convey our sincere appreciation to the crews for helping to stabilize this patient! Although a tragic situation, due to the selfless generosity of this family, many lives were saved."

"My hat is off to those of you who participated and got out there and did your job," Becker said, as he called on all 12 first responders to come up to the front to recognize their role in the life-saving effort. "These are the folks who made sure that four people got another chance at life, and I want to thank the Chisholm Trail 100 Club for recognizing them."

Fort Worth Fire Chief Jim Davis — who Becker describes as a "special friend of Cresson's" — noted it's important for the community and the department to recognize these first responders for their heroic actions.

"It doesn't matter if you're a paid department, or a volunteer department; it doesn't matter if you're a big department or a small department," Davis said. "Every one of us has one



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thing in common, and that's we're problem solvers. We're asked to solve a problem. Most times, it's a problem we didn't plan to have to deal with. Generally speaking, it's not a problem that we created, but we're asked to fix it; we're asked to deal with it. This is a particular situation where a problem you were being asked to fix didn't have the turnout that we all would like, and that means standing with the celebration of a survivor...You didn't cause that problem. You did your best to make a difference in that person's life, but that person and that person's family had done something ahead of time and after her injury in order to make a difference in others — and that is the gift of life."

Davis explained six months ago, his son-in-law passed away unexpectedly, leaving his daughter and two grandkids — but he added that the last thing his son-in-law gave in this life was the selfless act of being an organ donor.

"I've experienced what you're here talking about tonight," Davis said. "A lot of times, we don't think about

that fact when you're on that run. Sometimes you've done this enough, you've got enough experience and you know this is not going to have a good outcome, but you know the right thing to do is to keep trying to figure it out, because there's always an opportunity for the family to have support down the line...and there's always the opportunity for that person's final act of kindness to leave a gift — and that gift, in this particular case, is the gift of organ donation."

Benbrook Fire Chief Jason Tate said while there's only 30 paid firefighters in the city of Benbrook, his team always manages to show up in the right place at the right time.

"I couldn't be more proud of them," Tate said. "I love every one of them. I really do — and we really appreciate our relationship that we have with Cresson."

Kathryn Moore, representing Tarrant County Emergency Services District No. 1, said it was an honor to be at the ceremony to honor the lifesaving efforts of the first responders.

"On behalf of Tarrant

County, we're very proud of you and very grateful for how you serve the community so well, so sacrificially and so bravely," Moore said. "We're very proud of Chief Tate and Chief Becker and the partnerships you guys have. You do such a great job as a team. Thank you all so much, and congratulations."

To honor both Cresson VFD and Benbrook EMS, the Chisholm Trail 100 Club awarded both departments a lifesaving clock — marking the seventh lifesaving award for Cresson VFD.

"Their thought process is that it represents the time that the life saved added to somebody's chance to be around," Becker explained.

"Whatever you take out of this tonight, you guys did a hell of a job," Davis added. "You all went home safe. You all, I hope, are continuing to take care of each other, and you all recognize that in that particular setting, one death, one unfortunate situation, resulted in the ability for four others to be a little bit more healthy and to continue to live a life — and hopefully live in that person's honor."