

HONORING 10 EXCEPTIONAL FIRST RESPONDERS



October 28, 2020



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Honoring Billings' finest

Sacrifice. That is the one word that stuck with me while getting to know this year's celebrated first responders. The 10 men and women are clearly brave, obviously devoted to helping their community both as professionals and as volunteers, but all of that still boils down to sacrifice and what they give to their communities.

I asked them raw, hard questions. I asked them about the best and the worst parts of being one of the first people on a scene. I asked them about the sacrifices they make and how we, the community that relies on them, unknowingly take what they go through for granted. It is the time spent away from their family, their children, their partners, and their very life. It is having the immense pressure and ability to be there when the



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call is made – during or after an event. It is the moments that push them to tears and the moments they find joy in helping others. I asked these questions so we can better know what they go through, and truly appreciate their role in our community.

These interviews are in their words, their own stories – and I am in awe of the sheer impressiveness, valor and sincerity.

On behalf of the Billings Gazette and on a personal note, I wish to congratulate each of these 10 men and women for this recognition. I also want to extend a sincere mention of gratitude to all first responders – thank you for your service, dependability, and your sacrifice.

*Senior Editor of Special Sections,
Charity Dewing*

First Responders is a special advertising section of The Billings Gazette.

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To view video commentary from the honorees visit:

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KOREN BLOOM

AGE: 47

TITLE: PARAMEDIC

DEPARTMENT: AMERICAN
MEDICAL RESPONSE

YEARS AS A FIRST
RESPONDER: 27



LARRY MAYER, Gazette staff

Background:

I was born and raised in Billings. I started my career in EMS as a Volunteer in Virginia Beach in 1993 before coming back home and starting at MedTrans (AMR) in 1997.

What brought you to this career path?

There had been an accident following a microburst that my family came upon. I was about to enter the 8th grade. I felt frustrated and helpless for the people in the accident and I wanted to be able to help.

What is a day in this job like?

A day in the job of a prehospital provider is stocking equipment, preparing for a call, responding to and providing the care, then the cleanup, and paperwork after. There is little downtime between calls as the Billings area continues to grow. Most days are moving around to help cover areas of town to be able to provide a quick response time, so we do not stop moving through the 12 hours of our shifts.

What are some highlights?

Highlights of our job are some of the people that we meet. We get to meet people from all different backgrounds. We get to hear stories and become familiar with several of the patients that we transport to and from appointments. We work closely with other emergency responders and get to build some great friendships because of the way we rely on each other throughout the day.

Tell me about one of your best days on the job:

One of the best days on the job was very busy. I remember that I went on back-to-back cardiac arrest calls and had been able to successfully restore pulses for both of the people and they both were able to make good recoveries after.

Please see **BLOOM**, Page G7

AGE: 42
TITLE: POLICE OFFICER
DEPARTMENT: BILLINGS POLICE
DEPARTMENT
YEARS AS A FIRST RESPONDER: 16

KATHY BROWN

Background:

I was born and raised on a farm in Kansas. I always liked the idea of helping people so once I had the opportunity, I joined the local volunteer EMS service and fell in love with public service. I met my husband Jeff who was a firefighter/EMT and we soon got married. Shortly after we married, I attended a two-year paramedic program and started working as a paramedic in Garden City, Kansas. We moved to Billings in 2006, where I continued working as a paramedic. In 2016, I was hired by the Billings Police Department and started my law enforcement career.

What brought you to this career?

EMS professionals work very closely with law enforcement. As a paramedic, I always admired the profession. I loved the professionalism and teamwork that I saw from the BPD and I wanted to be a part of the brotherhood.

What is a day in this job like?

Every day I show up to work, I know that I really have no clue what I am going to be a part of. This job is completely unpredictable. I like to say, "things are always never as they seem." You may think you have an idea of what kind of call you are responding to only to find out that the information given to dispatch was grossly inaccurate.

What are some highlights?

I love the fact that I get to be outside and not stuck behind a desk. I feel privileged to be working with a group of like-minded professionals that work side by side with me through blood, sweat and tears. It is pretty amazing.

Tell me a best day on the job:

I was involved in a pretty cool incident a couple of years ago. We (noon shift) were sitting in briefing at "the barn" (where we



Courtesy photo

keep our cars, do our training, and have our daily briefing) when there was a loud knock at the door. One of the officers answered and a male, who was pretty shook up said that his friend had just been stabbed. The male had brought his friend to the barn and laid him on the ground in the parking lot. We all went outside to help and found the victim lying on the ground covered in blood, barely responding. With my paramedic background, I was tasked with providing medical aid to the victim. Officer Gaertner, who is also an EMT, offered to help me. Together, we removed the victim's clothing and found a large stab wound in his right upper abdomen. I remember telling Officer Gaertner that this would be a perfect scenario to use combat gauze (a dressing that is laced with a clotting agent to stop bleeding). Officer Gaertner told me that he just happened to have some in his patrol car and went to get it. Using the combat dressing, I was able to reach into the victim's abdomen and find the site where the blood was coming from. I placed the dressing directly on the site and packed the wound to stop the bleed. AMR arrived a short time later and transported the victim to the hospital. I was told later that the victim "died" three times before they were able to completely stop the bleeding in surgery. I was also told that if it wasn't for the combat dressing, he would not have made it. Being able to have a direct impact on someone's life is pretty rewarding.

Please see **BROWN**, Page G7



OUR THANKS TO ALL FIRST RESPONDERS

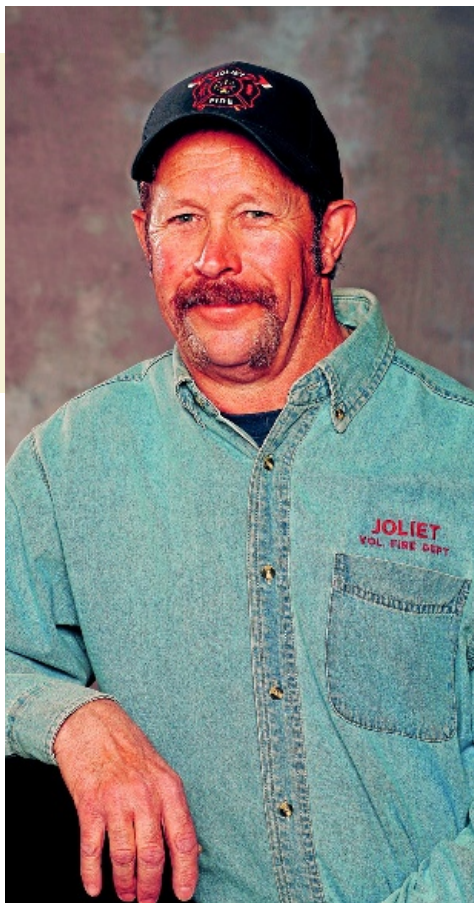
In honor of First Responders Day, AMR would like to thank the men and women who serve the Billings community each day, including Koren Bloom.

Thank you to Koren, and all Billings First Responders, for your dedication and commitment to serve!

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AGE: 62
TITLE: ENGINEER AND PRESIDENT OF THE FIREFIGHTERS ASSOCIATION
DEPARTMENT: JOLIET VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT, RURAL DISTRICT ONE AND TOWN OF JOLIET EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICE
YEARS AS A FIRST RESPONDER: 43
 YEARS WITH THE FIRE DEPARTMENT;
 41 YEARS WITH THE JOLIET VOLUNTEER AMBULANCE SERVICE

CHARLES 'CHARLIE' BUECHLER



CASEY PAGE, Billings Gazette

Background:

I was born in Billings, spent time in Wyoming and Texas as a child. I moved back to the Joliet area in 1971 and have been here since. I started work at Joliet Public Works while still in high school and this led to working full time after graduation. This is also when I joined the fire department. I was asked by one of the officers if I wanted to sign on, and that is how it all started. A couple of years later, that same person asked if I would drive the ambulance on a call. I took that trip, and shortly after, I was taking my first EMT course.

What brought you to this career?

Like a lot of people, a childhood dream. Many circumstances led up to it, being asked to join, being around during the day, wanting to help. But I guess it kind of chose me if you can call it that.

What is a day in this job like?

That's a tough one to answer. Being on a small department we can go days without a call. Then it breaks loose, and you could have anything from a gas smell, a house fire, a vehicle crash with extraction, wild-land fire, false alarms, going to the school for fire prevention week. Basically, going from a work or relaxed mode and then all

out to get there and do what you are trained for to help who ever and whatever out.

What are some highlights?

The years on the department, the new station and being involved in a community supported organization.

Tell me about one of your best days on the job:

When we do fire prevention, we talk to kids in kindergarten through 3rd grade, and when we ask questions, some of the kids will answer back from what we talked about last year or a couple of years ago. You know then you made a lasting impression and hopefully they take that with them into their older years.

What are some of the struggles as a first responder?

Trying to have family time as well as answering calls, keeping up with the hours of training that is required to go on calls.

Tell me about a hard day on the job:

Going to a scene of a car crash and dealing with and seeing dead children.

Please see **BUECHLER**, Page G7

AGE: 40
TITLE: ASSISTANT CHIEF OF TRAINING/EMS COORDINATOR
DEPARTMENT: CITY OF BILLINGS FIRE DEPARTMENT
YEARS AS A FIRST RESPONDER: 20

BRYAN FRANCIS

Background:

Growing up, I was the kid that my parents had to drag inside. I enjoyed being outside and working with my hands. While in college, one of my friends suggested that I try out for the local fire department reserve program. I have always enjoyed being outdoors, and after the tryouts, I was addicted. That led me to a resident position where I got to live at the fire station while I was attending college. I quickly focused on wrapping-up my college degree and began testing for a full-time firefighting position. Along the way, I discovered that I enjoyed emergency medical response and began working towards becoming a paramedic, which is the highest prehospital level of care. That journey culminated with a job offer from the City of Billings and a chance at my dream career.

What brought you to this career path?

Fate. I was in my junior year of college and had begun to look at master's programs in the field of psychology. While I found the subject interesting, it lacked a physical component that you experience while working for a hands-on job. Little did I know that I was going to take a hard-left turn and enter into one of the more physically demanding jobs in the marketplace.

What is a day in this job like?

It depends. I like to tell people that while we may show up to work at the same physical location, the days are always different. Just like everyone, we have good days and bad days while at work. You may arrive and hit the ground running, or it is slow, and you end up cleaning and preparing equipment. Currently, I get the privilege and honor of training new recruits. It is hands down one of my favorite times of the year (although it can be pretty stressful) as I get to share my passion and enthusiasm for the job with the newest hires.



LARRY MAYER, Billings Gazette

What are some highlights?

I always enjoy hearing about people that we have helped and their path to recovery. Tell me about one of your best days on the job:

I don't think one day, in particular, stands out. What does stand out is getting to hear all of the personal stories from co-workers. I currently work a day shift position, which means I get to see more department staff than when I was working shift work. Each morning, when a new shift takes over, the stories start rolling, and I usually end up sitting in my office chuckling.

What are some of the struggles as a first responder?

I believe first responders carry an enormous burden of guilt. It is human nature to feel conflicted when you show up to help someone, and there is nothing that you can do. You end up being a witness to fate despite your best efforts. The modern term for this is "moral injury." Moral injury as defined by the Disabled American Veterans "is when one feels they have violated their conscience or moral compass when they take part in, witness, or fail to prevent an act that disobeys their own moral values or personal principles." First responders are placed on a pedestal and viewed by many as having superhuman powers. When there is a poor outcome of the situation, it may feel like a failure and thus enters moral injury. In the end, you have the rest of your life to reflect on these moments, which places you in a constant state of internal conflict. This, coupled with a lack of sleep, are problematic issues that the modern first responder is dealing with, and there isn't an easy solution.

Please see **FRANCIS**, Page G9

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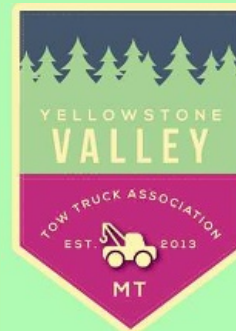
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AGE: 34
TITLE: CAPTAIN
DEPARTMENT: GLENDIVE FIRE DEPARTMENT
YEARS AS A FIRST RESPONDER: 10 YEARS

TRAVIS HUBER

Background:

I was born and raised in Miles City. I graduated from Custer County High School and Miles Community College. At MCC I met my now-wife, Jessie, who is from Glendive. I moved to Glendive in 2008, working for BNSF. In 2009, my wife and I got married. We have two children, Breck, 6 years old and Emersyn, 9 years old.

I joined the Glendive Fire Department in 2010 as a volunteer firefighter. The department is comprised of mostly volunteers with four being full-timers. We currently have 20 dedicated and hardworking members. I am currently employed with Montana-Dakota Utilities Company.

What brought you to this career path?

When I moved 80 miles east to Glendive from Miles City, I really did not know anybody and wanted to get involved in the community. I was also pushed into joining from a good friend and co-worker, Colby Sampson. I have always been the type of person to help people in a time of need and found that I really enjoy the department.

What is a day in this job like?

The Glendive Fire Department is a volunteer department, except for four full-timers. All of the volunteer firefighters carry pagers and have full-time jobs. All of the employers are generous enough to allow us to leave work and respond to emergencies. There is a lot of work that goes into being on the fire department, not only from responding to fires and emergencies, but also all of the training that goes into being a capable/competent firefighter.

What are some highlights?

There are a lot of highlights to being a firefighter. I think for me personally, the



MIKE CLARK, Billings Gazette

fact that we are the first to arrive to help people in need – it is possibly the scariest thing a family can go through. Another is the camaraderie among the others on the department. Lastly, watching young new firefighters joining and taking responsibilities that make them a valuable part of the team.

Tell me about one of your best days on the job:

I guess one memory that sticks out in my mind is when there was a kitchen fire that started on the stove at a family dwelling. When we arrived on scene, the house had heavy smoke on both levels. There were two kids on the second floor hanging out the window from the smoke. We had one group of three firefighters enter through the main floor. I was part of another group that deployed a ladder to retrieve the kids from the second floor. Those two kids were terrified, but as a team, we were able to safely get them out and make them feel comforted.

What are some of the struggles as a first responder?

I think the number one struggle for me as a volunteer firefighter is the donated time away from my family. I have missed events and games for my kids.

Also, being involved in fires and calls in the middle of the night all to return to my full-time job in the morning. Another struggle is being involved in fires during winter, when it is 20 below zero, wet and cold to the bone.

Please see **HUBER**, Page G9

AGE: 50
TITLE: BATTALION CHIEF
DEPARTMENT: BILLINGS FIRE DEPARTMENT
YEARS AS A FIRST RESPONDER: 22
YEARS AS A FIRST RESPONDER, 18 WITH BFD

JASON LYON

Background:

I am from Billings. I graduated from Senior High School in 1988, and Rocky Mountain College in 1993 with a degree in business.

I was on an alpine ski-racing team and I loved it. I loved the rush and the physicality of it. Then, I got a sales job and really missed skiing. So, I went to Red Lodge and got a ski-patrol job. What I really liked about ski patrol was how every day was different and I was helping people. I did that for five years.

There was a group of people that came up to ski all of the time and they were firefighters. I got to know them on a personal level. One day, one of them said I should join the fire department because I was fit, worked in harsh and challenging conditions, and would be good at it.

I started volunteering with the ambulance company in Red Lodge and was eventually hired on as a Red Lodge firefighter. Volunteer work showed me that I wanted to be a firefighter as a full-time job.

When the 9/11 attacks happened, it really solidified my desire to be a firefighter. The bravery of the New York firefighters was inspirational and there was a moment of clarity for me and I knew I was making the right choice.

What is a day in this job like?

Usually a firefighter shift begins at 7 a.m. and ends at 7 a.m. the next day – it is a 24-hour shift.

Most firefighters arrive about a half an hour early, which speaks to their dedication. They begin checking all of the equipment and make sure everything on the truck is working.

If we don't have a call – and we usually do – we all eat breakfast together and talk about the plan for the day. We follow up with the other stations via Zoom to let everyone know the plan for the day.

Calls vary. We are trained and work un-



CASEY PAGE, Billings Gazette

der harsh and unusual conditions. We do CPR and patient assessment. We extricate people from cars using the jaws of life. We do rescue work on the Rims and for mountain bike riders in Ironwood.

There is risk. I am more concerned for the safety of my coworkers, especially when attending to a car accident. Hanging out by the side of the road at a traffic accident is very dangerous and many first responders get hurt.

Fear is, on occasion, there when responding. But, we go through a lot of training, and we have a protocol we follow. So, we follow the plan as an emergency scene unfolds but we are always thinking about what we do next. No two calls are the same. So, even though there are protocols we follow, we need to be ready to improvise through each situation.

In 2002, there were about 30 calls per day with six fire stations. Now, there are about 50 calls a day with seven fire stations.

Recently, we received over 70 calls in a day. There was not a single event like a natural disaster or anything, but Billings is busy and is getting busier. The COVID-19 reopening caused the volume to go up significantly.

Training is part of the day. While we practice protocols, those change, and we need to be able to adapt and learn constantly. We always need to continue with education and never say, "this is how we have always done it."

Training begins in the morning and goes half the day and then second training begins for the other half. So, half the company trains, and then the other half trains so we always have firefighters ready for 911 calls.

Please see **LYON**, Page G11

Bloom

From G2

What are some of the struggles as a first responder?

It is easy to feel overwhelmed. There are very busy days. We have to hurry from call to call, and it seems as though there are not enough of us to go around to help everyone. Some of the calls we go on are emotionally hard. The situations that we are in, that we see, and that we live do affect us.

Tell me about one of the hardest days on the job:

One of the hardest days I had on the job was September 11, 2001. With the terrorist attacks, we were not sure what to expect through

the day, there was a fear of what was yet to come. We all watched as fellow first responders and fellow citizens were killed. We had to be able to try to process what was happening nationally as well as be able to respond and care for the people here locally.

What would you like to say to someone thinking of following your footsteps?

We see the best and the worst in people. We are there during the worst events that people will experience. Make sure that you never lose your compassion for other people. Learn all that you can, be respectful, and treat patients as if they are a member of your family.

Brown

From G3

What are some of the struggles as a first responder?

One of the struggles that all first responders deal with is the fact that we will miss holidays, weddings, birthday parties and so on. It is something that we knew would happen when we choose this career but it's not always easy on friends and family. Another struggle is balancing life outside of work. Being able to get away from work and the stress that is associated with this job is not just a good idea, it is a must.

Tell me about one of the hardest days on the job:

A number of years ago, I responded to a call where someone accidentally drove over a young child. When we arrived on the scene, it was absolute chaos. We had the individual who drove over the child extremely distraught. We had the mother of the child beside herself and we had a child on the ground, covered in blood, not responding, not breathing. We started CPR and did everything we could to save the child, but we were unsuccessful. Watching the mother and the

individual who drove over the child looking on and begging us to help was an incredibly helpless feeling. We are trained to handle incidents like this, but it never gets easy. I can only imagine how much worse it would be for a parent to experience a tragedy like this. I just pray that with time they found some sort of peace.

What would you like to say to someone thinking of following your footsteps?

This job is a service-oriented job. You will not be successful if you let things that are being said or done to you, get to you. Doing a ride-along is a great opportunity to get an idea of what you are getting into. Having an honest conversation with yourself to make sure you're doing it for the right reasons is so important. If you want to serve your community, it is the most rewarding career you can imagine.

What else would you like to say about being a first responder?

Every day that I get to go to work, I feel blessed and privilege to serve this community. Billings truly is a great place to be a police officer. Our citizens shower us with incredible support, and I do not take that for granted.

Buechler

From G4

What would you like to say to someone thinking of following your footsteps?

Think long and hard about it before you join. It takes a strong will and commitment to be a paid or volunteer first responder. And it's not for everyone; I've seen so many join, then give it up right away because it was too hard or took more time than they could devote. But it can be a rewarding career.

What else would you like to say about being a first responder?

I have seen a lot over the years, some I wish I hadn't, some I wish I could forget but can't, some that has made me angry, some that makes you wonder why and how. It is actually kind of hard to say, there's so much you see if you stay with it long enough. I do know one thing for sure, of all of the good and bad I've seen over the years, I am glad I was there with the crew when somebody needed us. Would I do it again? Yes.




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KRISTOPHER MOORE

AGE: 35
TITLE: OWNER/OPERATOR
DEPARTMENT: THIN LINE TOWING AND RECOVERY LLC
YEARS AS A FIRST RESPONDER: 8



CASEY PAGE, Billings Gazette

Background:

I was raised in a home with a mother who worked at a residential youth treatment facility and my father was a police officer.

My adult life started my career as an auto mechanic due to my love of cars. After 10 years as an ASE Master Technician, I found that I no longer enjoyed my chosen career. I was not happy going to work.

In 2012, I started doing some tow work with a friend part time and fell in love with the profession. In 2013, I left my mechanics career and started towing full time. I worked for a local Billings company for five years. After a major life event and withering business at my current employer, I decided it was a good time to do it on my own. In 2017, with the help of some family, I started Thin Line Towing and Recovery.

What is a day in this job like?

Many days are nonstop from early morning until the evening with the middle of the night calls thrown in from time to time. Most days are filled with moving a disabled vehicle from traffic, parking lots, or homes to a repair shop.

Being on the law enforcement rotation system means there are a large number of accidents to respond to – from fender benders with a sliced tire, to a vehicle upside down and half submerged in water. While enroute, you are hoping everyone involved is alright and wondering what you're going to need to do to get the scene cleared. In addition, you must keep yourself and everyone else on scene safe from other vehicles on the road.

What are some highlights?

Some of my more significant or memorable calls are ones when the person that has called is having a tough time, and my being there and getting their situation dealt with causes their stress level to fall. I like to see relief on their faces and know I am helping them through a situation they would rather not be in. One of the major ones is

when a call comes in for a child locked in a vehicle. Typically, the parent is a lot more worked up, stressed, and panicked than the child that is in the vehicle. So, the goal is to get to them as quickly as possible. Once on scene, the first thing is to be calm but fast, reassure the panicked parent that it will be alright, they're not the first to have done it and won't be the last, and quickly gain access into the vehicle. Then their worries can dissipate, and they can know their child is okay.

Tell me about a best day on the job:

This year with the COVID-19 pandemic causing business closures, social distancing guidelines and restrictions, many children were not able to have birthday parties and celebrating was hard to do. Also, school graduations were very limited and restricted. So, this spring I decided to put on "birthday drive-bys," where I rallied as many tow trucks as I could from the Billings area. We would set it up with parents and give the kids a parade of tow trucks to drive by their houses – blaring horns with all of our emergency lights flashing. It was a big hit with the kids, their families, and the tow-truck drivers. It was so much fun. Then in June, I organized "light up for grads" and invited all of the tow companies, Billings Police, Yellowstone County Sheriff, Montana Highway Patrol, Billings Fire Department, and American Medical Response. We lined up 30 emergency vehicles on the rims by the water tower and all hit our lights to show support and celebration for the grads.

Please see **MOORE**, Page G14

JOHN W. PEARSON

AGE: 33
TITLE: PATROL OFFICER
DEPARTMENT: BILLINGS POLICE DEPT.
YEARS AS A FIRST RESPONDER: 8.5



LARRY MAYER, Billings Gazette

Background:

I was born and raised in Billings and attended Skyview High School. I graduated in 2005 and went on to attend and graduate from Montana State University, Bozeman. I earned a bachelor's degree in Animal Science. I moved back to Billings in 2011 and applied for the Billings Police Department. I was not hired at that time but was hired with the Musselshell County Sheriff's Office in April of 2012. I worked there until December 2016, when I applied with the Billings Police Department again. I was hired in January of 2017, and I have worked here since.

What brought you to this career?

I have always been interested in law enforcement. I have always had a sense of wanting to help those who may not be able to help themselves and have always strived to do what was right. I feel like this career path was a great way to achieve both of those.

What is a day in this job like?

Every day is different. Some days can be very slow, with many cold calls such as thefts, property crimes, and not many in-progress calls. Other days can be extremely fast paced, finishing one in-progress such as an assault, or shooting call, and seeing there are several more in-progress calls holding. This job can be very mentally taxing some days, but that aspect keeps the job from getting boring. I thoroughly enjoy the fact that I don't know what I am going to get from day to day. I also enjoy most of the interaction I have with people. My hope is that the majority of my interactions with the public are positive interactions, and that the public feels like we are there to help them.

What are some highlights?

You get to do and see some pretty neat things in this line of work. I have pulled

people from fires, I have performed CPR on people, I have pulled people from car wrecks, I have helped so many people, and it makes the job worthwhile when you can help someone and see the look of relief on their face, or see a smile from them. This job isn't all about chasing bad guys and doing "cool" things. It's about the community and doing things for others that they might not be able to do themselves.

Tell me about a best day on the job:

There have been many great days. For me, a good day is when I am able to close a case or find a suspect and wrap-up a call. There are some days where I feel like I drive around and respond to calls that I cannot solve or close, and I feel like I am not accomplishing anything. But there are those days where it feels like everything comes together, and I was able to accomplish a task or complete an investigation. Those are the best days.

What are some of the struggles as a first responder?

I feel like the current environment for first responders is a bit tricky right now. I know there are so many first responders that put on their uniform every time they go to work, and they go to work to do the

Please see **PEARSON**, Page G14

Francis

From G4

Tell me about one of the most challenging days on the job:

Fighting fire may seem like the most challenging and physically demanding part of the job, and in truth, it is one of the easier parts of the job. The fire department has expanded past "just fighting fires," and in reality, deals with society's elements no one wants to see. We frequently find ourselves helping someone off the floor at 3 a.m., which seems like an inconvenience to most people. However, it is a life-altering action to the affected person. Currently, I have been assigned as the infection control officer for the fire department. This job has challenged me both mentally and administratively, which is a far cry from getting to ride in the back seat of the fire truck. During this global pandemic, first responders have been caught between the science of infection control and Americans' cultural values. This dilemma is tearing at the country's moral fiber and adding mental strain to an already busy group

Fighting fire may seem like the most challenging and physically demanding part of the job, and in truth, it is one of the easier parts of the job.

of people. This, coupled with the changes that we are experiencing in our personal lives, has made this moment in time the most difficult in my career. With that being said, I wouldn't change anything career-wise (except the global pandemic) as the constant challenge is what keeps me motivated.

What would you like to say to someone thinking of following in your footsteps?

Never give up pursuing your dreams. You only get one shot at life, and you owe it to yourself to maximize your effort. To quote Mark Von Appen, one of our fire service role models, "Do your job, treat people right, give all-out effort, have an all-in attitude." This is solid advice that will take you far in any career.

What else would you like to say about being a first responder?

It has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my life. Without the support of my family, mentors, and peers, the journey would be difficult, if not impossible. I truly cherish each day that I go to work as I know at some point, my career will be over, and I will be reflecting on what occurred.

Huber

From G6

Tell me about a hard day on the job:

A specific instance that really hits me, even to this day, is when we were called to a fire at an apartment building. I was new on the department and was on the first truck that arrived on scene. My wife and I had just had our daughter. When we arrived, we were informed that nobody knew if anybody was still in the apartment. So, we searched the rooms of the apartment that had heavy smoke and we made it to a room that had a crib. I remember breathing very heavy and my heart racing as I reached in searching for a child. Luckily, there was nobody in the apartment, but I still remember that call vividly.

What would you like to say to someone thinking of following your footsteps?

I would say give it a shot. It is rewarding, not only because of the people you get to meet and become lifelong friends with, but also the fact that you are helping others. You are a positive impact on the community that you live in.

What else would you like to say about being a first responder?

It is a rewarding job. I am happy to help people in my community and be a positive impact. I am not a hero, nor do I like to be recognized as one. There are numerous other people out there that deserve recognition.

Thank You!

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Lyon

From G6

When the alarm happens, we have a one-minute turnout.

The engineer has the hardest job – they must figure out where and how to get to the location the quickest and ensure there are no roadblocks or construction. The engineer is not only the navigator but also operates the tools, truck and is the driver.

In the evening, we have a scheduled work-out hour – making sure we are fit is a lifesaver.

What are some highlights?

A highlight of my job, for most firefighters, is when you see the practice come together and it works.

Tell me about one of your best days on the job:

There was a CPR in progress for a young child with a heart condition. The child was in cardiac arrest and everyone in the company worked hard, all together, and got his heart beating. I see his father still, and I get updates about his boy. It was one of my most proud moments.

What are some of the struggles as a first responder?

There are a few. Burnout is one. Mental health issues due to call volume can be hard, followed up by staffing-related issues. We need more firefighters, and we need at least one or two more stations.

We recognize the result of not having enough people. We can handle one major event at a time. If half of our department is at a major event at one time, we are putting people at risk.

We treat each situation like it is a life or death emergency until proven otherwise. So, when we don't have enough engines and people are depending on us, that's tough. More and more, we have had our engines responding to calls and then additional calls come in and we are unable to respond because we didn't have any available trucks or people.

I see it clearly. It affects everyone that

works that day. We need more units. We run very lean and try to be fiscally responsible and get the job done.

First responder suicide is a huge concern. BFD, our union, and administration came together to recognize this problem and provided a solution and implemented peer support. It is reassuring to know that if I have a problem, I know I can sit down with another first responder in a nonprofessional manor and talk about it. Peer support helps. Having one another cope with the pressure and trauma is valuable. I am so proud of our department. We are

committed to each other's mental health.

Tell me about one of the hardest days on the job:

Truthfully, the last eight months have been the hardest of my entire career. The fire department had to adapt all kinds of things. Being the battalion chief, we help manage the department's COVID-19 response.

One of the hardest ones is the shortage of N95 masks. In

August, we were almost out of N95 masks and went to Hobby Lobby to buy materials and fixed our masks because they were broken. Working with hobbled equipment and having to work and take care of civilians is hard. We couldn't get the things to protect our people and the public.

What would you like to say to someone thinking of following your footsteps?

I would say that being a firefighter for Billings is the single best thing I have done in my life. You must be willing to learn new things every day and perform tasks to protocol while changing on a moment's notice. You must put others before you. It is especially important to keep a great sense of humor to help with mental health. If you don't laugh, you'll cry. It relieves the pressure and puts the bad things out of your mind.

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TYLER SENNETT

AGE: 28
TITLE: PATROL DEPUTY. CURRENTLY ASSIGNED AS LOCKWOOD SCHOOL SRO.
DEPARTMENT: YELLOWSTONE COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE
YEARS AS A FIRST RESPONDER: 4



LARRY MAYER, Billings Gazette

Background:

I graduated from Billings West High School. I received an associate degree from Dawson Community College in Glendive. After receiving my associate degree, I attended Montana State University, Billings and received my bachelor's degree.

What brought you to this career path?

I enjoy a career where no two days are alike. It requires me to change and adapt myself to help the community I work for.

What is a day in this job like?

It is a balance between being a teacher and a neighbor. We have to take calls where we have to enforce laws and teach about the current laws, but outside of that, we get to be the friendly neighbor that you can stop and talk to.

What are some highlights:

Being able to meet new people and hear different backgrounds. Learning who is in the community and learning what some of their life struggles have been brings a new appreciation to the diversity of our county.

Tell me about one of your best days on the job:

The best days on the job are when I get to train other deputies. As an instructor, I get to pass my knowledge on to trainees who may be able to use it later to help others. Being around all my friends while doing so just makes it that much better.

What are some of the struggles as a first responder?

Separation of work and family. We often carry a lot of emotions through our workday and may reflect those emotions on the family. We get too involved with our work and forget it affects the ones around us.

What would you like to say to someone thinking of following your footsteps?

Learn to reach out to the community. We often forget that the community is the most important part of our job. Reaching out and creating relationships with the community will not only help with your job but will help with your mental health.

What else would you like to say about being a first responder:

If you are a first responder or trying to become a first responder, do not be afraid to try new things. Make yourself grow to become a better person for yourself and the community you are helping to grow.

STORMEY TUCKER

AGE: 38
TITLE: CAPTAIN, EMT, TRAINING OFFICER
DEPARTMENT: WORDEN FIRE DEPARTMENT
YEARS AS A FIRST RESPONDER: 15



LARRY MAYER, Billings Gazette

Background:

I grew up ranching, which included the love and care for all of the animals, and working hard for what we had – which led me in the direction of wanting to work hard and care for those who need help, especially in my community. So, I started off as a wildland firefighter and then joined a volunteer fire department. From there, I trained hard and worked my way up from a firefighter to becoming a captain and an EMT in the department. I was also given the opportunity to work for the Montana State University Fire Service Training School, which I have been with for 10 years now as an assistant training instructor. It has been a wonderful and great opportunity to be able to work with so many firefighters from different departments all over.

What brought you to this career path?

My family helped lead me towards wanting to be a first responder through instilling in me a commitment to my country, community, family, and friends.

What is a day in this job like?

The job has its moments where some days are good and some not so good. No matter what though, we as a department are family and will always be there for each other. We go on calls where most people are having the worst day of their life and we're supposed to be there to help them and make things better. Sometimes we can, and sometimes we cannot – and it's always the hardest when we cannot.

What are some highlights?

Giving station tours to kids and seeing the smiles on their faces, teaching the new recruits, working with the community, department barbecues and family gatherings.

Tell me about one of your best days on the job:

Reuniting a family after an accident and getting to meet all of them when they stopped by to say thank you for saving their son's life.

What are some of the struggles as a first responder?

Going on calls where you know the person or it's a call with a child involved. The mental and physical breakdown and struggle a person goes through can be the hardest. Another struggle is being a volunteer and knowing the hardships and struggles alone that it can bring. You could be going on a call with maybe only one or two more people responding and you wonder if it is going to be enough.

Tell me about one of the hardest days on the job:

One of the hardest days on the job was recovering a whole family from a car wreck. Knowing that there were children involved and that the family was on their way home for Thanksgiving made the recovery and aftermath all the more difficult. This incident has and will forever stay with me.

What would you like to say to someone thinking of following your footsteps?

This job is not for the faint of heart, but it is the most rewarding one you can have next to serving your country. You are not only serving your community, but those that pass through it. The job requires a great deal of hard work, commitment, and time away from family and friends. In the long run though, you gain more family and friends in this job. You must set goals for yourself and do everything you can to achieve them.

What else would you like to say about being a first responder?

I wouldn't change anything that I do as a first responder. I thoroughly enjoy my job and the involvement I have with it. I could not and would not be where I am today without the love and support from my family, friends, and coworkers.

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Moore

From G8

What are some of the struggles as a first responder?

Some of the accidents tow-truck drivers are called to can be tough scenes to deal with. Especially since it is the towing company's task to clean up the accident scene. Also, being as I am on call 24/7, finding time for family, vacations, and socializing can be difficult. The truck has to go with me wherever I go. There isn't much time for anything but work.

Tell me about one of the hardest days on the job:

In 2015, I was called to the scene of a fatality accident. It was a very violent accident involving two adult females and one child. The vehicle had struck a pole at a high rate of speed and pushed the firewall into the driver's seat and the roof into the driver's headrest. As a tow operator, it is our task

to do scene cleanup, and that day included vehicle parts, automotive fluids, and sadly, a fair amount of flesh and blood. Though the two passengers had minor injuries, the woman driving was deceased on scene. And that scene has stayed with me since that day.

What would you say to someone following your footsteps?

If you are considering a career in towing, it is far more than a career. To stay in it you have to love it. It is far more a lifestyle than it is a career. Being on call 24 hours means that your job comes first no matter what other things you may have planned that day: a dinner with the family, a birthday party, a night with friends – if your phone rings, you go. It means taking your truck to the store while your family takes the car so you can all go shopping together, knowing you very well might have to leave and no idea how long you may be gone – it could be an hour,

or you may not get home until your kids are headed to school the next morning – all the while knowing there is a decent chance someone may not give you room to work on the highway and you may not make it home at all.

This life is hard on you and on your family. So, you have to have the drive to do it and a family that understands and supports you. All the while, the majority of the public sees you as a greasy, half-brained, overcharging piece of disposable garbage that's just there to "pick up some scrap metal from the side of the road." You will give up your personal life to be appreciated by few and thought of as a glorified garbage man by most.

What else would you like to say about being a first responder?

You do not do this job for money, fame, or recognition. You do it for the love of the job, and the want to help people. To make somebody's day suck less.

Pearson

From G8

right thing. There is a small percentage of first responders who do not think and feel this way, and unfortunately, they are getting the attention. I am confident that the vast majority of first responders, not only in Billings, but in the nation, do what they do to the best of their ability, and for the right reasons.

Tell me about a hard day on the job:

I have had several hard days, but one of the worst I can remember is having to perform a death notification to a mother about her teenager. The mother was unaware that the teen had snuck out, and the teenager had gotten into a motor vehicle accident and passed away. It was truly heartbreaking to have to convince someone that their child was not still in their bed, just a few steps away.

What would you like to say to someone thinking of following your footsteps?

I would tell them that this career

is a fulfilling and great career, as long as they can look past the negativity, and do what is right. I have made so many great relationships with my coworkers, AMR, Billings Fire, and Yellowstone County Sheriff's Office. It is such a wonderful and humbling thing to work together with everyone, and to accomplish the same goals. Some of my closest relationships are with coworkers, or first responders from other agencies, and they are bonds that are stronger and closer than any other I have experienced. It is very rare to say you may have a coworker's life in your hands, and you would do anything, even pay the ultimate sacrifice, for them.

What else would you like to say about being a first responder?

I would like to let the community know that we are here for them. It may not seem like it sometimes, especially in the times we are in now, but ultimately, we come to work with the knowledge that we may not make it home, but we do it for the community, regardless. We put our pants on, one leg at a time, too. We may make mistakes, but most mistakes are unintentional, and we have the best interest of the community at heart.

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