

A life-changing moment

Barbara Ritenour, R.N., listened carefully to the call, “We’ve got a cardiac arrest. Defibrillated once. Has a pulse. Not responsive.” As the lead nurse of the resuscitation team at Legacy Good Samaritan, she prepared her team for the ambulance’s arrival. “Other than the diagnosis, we only knew how far they were out – 7 minutes,” she says. As the morning unfolded, this patient would take Barbara on an emotional and healing journey.

Mark Furiya’s shift began with the usual routine. As the only paramedic at Portland Fire and Rescue Station 6, he showed up to work shortly before 8 a.m. After roll call, the firefighters, as a crew, did a cross-training workout for about 45 minutes.

“I was feeling good until the workout was over,” Mark says. “Something felt weird in my chest; it was persistent, but didn’t really hurt.” Unsure if it was chest pain, Mark grabbed the station’s life pack, proceeded to his room and performed a EKG (electrocardiography). “I was looking at it and I remember thinking that doesn’t look right,” he recalls. And, then he collapsed.

Fortunately, a crew member heard him fall. Mark was on the floor with no pulse. The firefighters quickly initiated Basic Life Support – they started CPR and pulled out the AED (automated external defibrillator). “They shocked him once and got a pulse back,” Barbara reports.

Responding to one of their own, Station 6 shut down so the entire crew could accompany Mark to the Emergency Department. The medical team at Legacy Good Samaritan determined he had suffered a heart attack. “We activated the STEMI (ST-segment elevation myocardial infarction) protocol, which ensures cardiac patients are in the cath lab within an hour,” Barbara says.

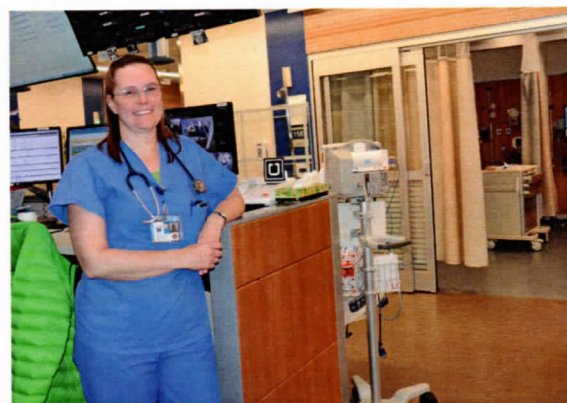
In the Emergency Department, firefighters milled in and out of the Resuscitation Room – a double-size room large enough to accommodate the respiratory therapist, multiple nurses and doctors, essential equipment, as well as four crew members.

Because this was a traumatic event for the entire station, having the crew in the room with Mark helped everyone process what was happening. “They work and live together – they’re like a family,” Barbara states. “I just remember the room was full of people – some firefighters and some staff.”

The Nurses’ Station now allows staff to track everything happening in the resuscitation room on several monitors, which is especially helpful when a lot of people are in the room. “My family said there were probably crowds of 20 firemen hanging around at one point,” Mark says. “I’m pretty sure they could have insisted people leave, but they were super nice, super good.”

Once Mark was taken to the cath lab, Barbara returned to the Nurses’ Station. That’s when she caught a glimpse of the fire chief, decked out in his dress blues. “It suddenly hit me,” she says. “I was taking care of a firefighter who was eerily similar to my brother.” In 2008, Barbara’s brother, a volunteer firefighter, had a cardiac event in the line of duty. Sadly, he passed away at the scene after his crew responded and attempted to resuscitate him.

“I know the other side of what could have happened,” she says. Her brother, like Mark, has three children. And, like her brother eight years earlier, Mark’s oldest is currently a high school senior. “I’m so happy I was able to be part of saving his life – so he can be there for his kids.”



Barbara Ritenour, R.N., stands by the Nurses’ Station, just outside the Resuscitation Room