

Trained and ready to respond

Fred Benzel headed to St. Francis Medical Center last May intending to support the friends of a Meadow Grove firefighter who had collapsed at a Grand Island restaurant. He ended up helping save Adam Wright's life.

Benzel, 27, and fellow firefighter Mark Bonser, both members of the Nebraska Serious Injury and Line of Duty Death Response Team, moved between the room where Wright was being treated and his friends who gathered at the hospital. The hospital was busy that night with several critical patients and the staff was overwhelmed. A couple of times while Benzel and Bonser were in the room, Wright coded, so they pitched in with CPR.

Fred was instrumental in saving this kid's life," Bonser said. "Fred's a great guy. I think he deserves a little recognition." During the recent annual meeting of the Nebraska Serious Injury and Line of Duty Death Response Team. Benzel was honored for his actions. It is the first such award to be given out by the team, which was formed in 2006, Bonser said. "I was very taken back," Benzel said. "I was just there to help, not to win an award."

Grand Island Fire Chief Troy Hughes also speaks highly of Benzel. "He's a newer member, but he's aggressive and he wants to learn new things," Hughes said. "He's become a (hazardous material) tech and he's involved in the community, which sets a positive example." He said Benzel's actions at St. Francis that May evening were a great asset to Wright's friends and family as well as the hospital staff. "His being there for the family meant a lot," Hughes said. "They appreciated it. He acted as a community liaison and linked them to other resources."

Benzel is quick to credit Wright's firefighter friends, who he was out with following a day at the Nebraska State Fire School, with giving Wright the immediate CPR that likely saved his life. "They deserve awards way more than Mark and I do," Benzel said. He has spoken to Wright and his friends on several occasions since the incident. Wright, then 24, remains a member of the volunteer Meadow Grove Fire Department. "He's doing real well," Benzel said.

Benzel has been certified in CPR since his high school days in North Platte. The courses were offered as part of his health class and he was drawn to them because of his interest in health care. The training came in handy once or twice in college when he came upon car accidents and was able to help some of the victims. While in high school, he considering going into a pre-med program to become an emergency room doctor. But he had a buddy whose dad was a firefighter/paramedic and after spending time with him, Benzel decided he'd spend less time in college and less money and go into a similar field.



Firefighter and paramedic Fred Benzel was recognized for assisting in CPR at St. Francis Medical Center in Grand Island to help a fellow firefighter who collapsed while in town for the Nebraska State Fire School. The firefighter survived and is still a member of the Meadow Grove Fire Department.
Grand Island Independent/Scott Kingsley

He attended Southeast Community College in Lincoln and received an associate's degree in Fire Protection Technology. He worked at MDS Harris Laboratory in Lincoln, the Lancaster County Community Blood Bank and was a medic with Midwest Medical Transport in Lincoln while testing to be a firefighter/paramedic. He also went through a two-year program with time in the classroom, hospital and riding in an ambulance to become a paramedic, the highest ranking in the emergency medical services field. The course required 800 to 900 hours of ride time and 500 to 600 hours of hospital time, he said.

He tested for four or five years, but the field was very competitive. He got discouraged and quit testing for a while before being offered a job in Grand Island in December 2006.

For the first six to eight weeks on the job, he learned firefighting techniques and the department's policies and procedures. He then started working the department's shifts of 24 hours on duty and 48 hours off, but was on probation for six months to a year. "It's the greatest job around," he said. "There's a lot of work when you have to do it and not much when you don't." During a 24-hour shift they typically work from 8 to 5 p.m. training and doing chores around the stations. They also answer medical and fire calls throughout the shift. There is down time after 5 p.m., he said. "The schedule is awesome," he said. "I work for 24 hours and then I can be home for two days with my kids, depending on what else I'm doing."

Like many GIFD employees, Benzel has other part-time jobs he works during his off hours. But he is also a family man. His wife, Heather, is a registered nurse in the oncology research department at St. Francis. They have two children, Wyatt, 2 1/2, and 1-year-old Arabella.

Benzel is also a member of the GIFD's honor guard, a role that took him to Wymore in November 2007. He traveled there to take part in the funeral of Jeremy Wach, a volunteer firefighter killed in the line of duty. After helping with the funeral, Benzel realized there was something there he could grasp and help with. So he joined the newly formed Nebraska Serious Injury and Line of Duty Death Response Team to further help those affected by the death or serious injury of a firefighter or paramedic.

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Radiologic Technology alumna grateful to SCC for education, kindness

Rhonda Sarber was determined not to let an EF5 tornado derail her plans to become a certified radiologic technologist.

It easily could have.

At 9:45 p.m. on May 4, 2007, the lives of the approximately 1,600 residents of Greensburg, Kan., changed forever when the tornado, estimated to be 1.7 miles wide, did its best to wipe the town off the map. An estimated 95 percent of Greensburg was destroyed. The other 5 percent was severely damaged.

Among the businesses destroyed was Sarber's employer, Kiowa County Memorial Hospital, where she had worked in the X-ray department five years.

"When I look at the videos (of the destruction) now I think 'Oh, that was bad,'" Sarber said. "But back then, right after it happened, the videos on TV didn't do it justice. It was bad, but we had a lot of help."

Sarber, her husband Matt and two daughters moved to Greensburg in 2001 from her native Garden City, a community in southwest Kansas. It was a comfortable life, with a house in the middle of town.

A few years went by, and Sarber decided she wanted to learn more about her job and, in the process, make more money.

"I wanted to be a registered technician," Sarber said. "The closest (face-to-face) program was an hour-and-a-half away."

Since that wasn't a viable option, Sarber began to search the Web for programs that offered radiologic technology online. She found Southeast Community College, made a phone call and began the program in July 2006.

"I had taken all my prerequisites online, so I was already disciplined in that regard," she said. "You have to want it. You can't expect someone to do it for you."

But when the tornado destroyed all of her family's possessions, right in the middle of her SCC program, she figured she could use a helping hand.

That's when Tracy Buch, an instructor in Sarber's program at the time, decided to help.

"Tracy did this huge drive and brought me all this stuff to the hospital," Sarber said. "There were bags of clothes and other things."

The gesture helped Sarber realize that her SCC instructors not only wanted her to succeed academically, they also were caring and compassionate. Buch is now program co-chair and distance director.



Rhonda Sarber (bright scrubs), Gina Friesen (front center), Tracy Buch and staff technologist, Dianna Torres.

“There are a lot of things you learn that you don’t get on the job,” Sarber said. “There’s different ways of doing things. Radiology isn’t an exact science because each patient is different. The instructors demonstrated more than one way to image a patient. The program wasn’t overwhelming, but it was challenging.”

Sarber said Buch, former co-chair and distance learning coordinator Bev Harvey, and instructors Brandon Holt and Judy Mieth inspired her to get through the program. She graduated in June 2008.

“I learned so much more going through the program,” Sarber said. “There’s a huge knowledge base you gain going to school as opposed to work. And I really liked my instructors. They were awesome.”

In February 2009, Sarber and her fellow employees will begin work in the new Kiowa County Memorial Hospital. Construction on the new facility began in early 2009. It’s a far cry from the somewhat primitive facility the hospital was forced to use in the aftermath of the tornado.

The initial temporary hospital consisted of nine tents and opened just two weeks after the tornado. By December 2008, patient services and employee staff were moved into temporary modular units, and five tents were taken down. Sarber spent many nights in the tents.

“We had to be staffed 24/7 since there were no hotels and no house,” she said. “You got your sleeping bag and slept in the tent. It was fun. It was an adventure. But hopefully, I’ll never have to do it again.”

The Sarbers now live in Mullinville, a tiny community about 10 miles from Greensburg. Matt works in construction. Rhonda said she looks forward to the day Greensburg returns to a semblance of normalcy.

“We’re getting the new hospital, and a new school will be opening up this fall,” she said. “Everybody is still really optimistic. Building hasn’t slowed down at all. I’m looking forward to a theatre opening. I want to get to go to movies again.”

2003 alumna leads independent life despite lifelong diseases

Shelby Stubbendick could justify wearing a button that says “Why me?”

Since the day she was born she has dealt with two diseases that have made her life challenging to say the least. Still, Stubbendick, a 2003 Office Technology (now Office Professional) graduate, has a quick smile and a positive attitude.

“Sometimes I feel like ‘why me’, but I believe God only gives you what you can handle,” said Stubbendick, 28.

Diagnosed at age 3, Stubbendick has fibrous dysplasia, a bone disease that replaces normal bone with fibrous bone tissue, and McCune-Albright Syndrome, a genetic disease that affects the bones, pigmentation of the skin and growth hormones. The fibrous dysplasia has left Stubbendick short in stature. At present, there is no known cure for either disease.

At age 1, Stubbendick suffered a broken arm, the first of approximately 20 fractures that have included her arms, legs and back. She’s undergone surgeries on her legs at Shriner’s Hospital in Minneapolis. Her most recent hospitalization occurred in December 2009 when a rod that had been in her right femur 17 years began to cause problems and was removed. If left in her leg, an infection could have developed.

Despite her physical challenges, the youngest child of Ron and Sandy Stubbendick of Waverly earned an associate’s degree from SCC, lives independently and has held a part-time job at the Cabela’s call center in Lincoln since May 2008.

“I always thought I would go to Southeast,” said Stubbendick, a 2000 graduate of Waverly High School. “My sisters (Angie Rosendale-Cech and Tami Roesler) both went to Southeast.”

Interested in both the medical field and computers, Stubbendick combined the two areas by taking SCC’s Office Technology program with a Medical Office focus. After taking full-time hours at SCC her first quarter, she went part-time the rest of the way, all the while working in the drive-thru at the McDonald’s at 27th and Superior.

“The staff at SCC was very accommodating,” Stubbendick said. “In some computer classrooms I had a tote that I could put my feet on. And I also used a backpack on wheels while taking classes.”

After SCC, Stubbendick applied for 110 jobs, received seven interviews and one job offer.

“It was quite frustrating,” she said. “I had one interview with a small business, and the only question asked me was what my plans were for Thanksgiving.”

In December 2003, Stubbendick was hired full-time as a tele-recruiter at the Community Blood Bank at 84th and O St. She was responsible for calling blood donors to set up appointments as well as staffing the switchboard.

In June 2006, she took a job at Technical Management Inc., which later was acquired by Perot Systems Corp. Stubbendick performed data-entry and took phone calls regarding third-party insurance. She left that job in November 2007.

Stubbendick said she has experienced job discrimination. She said when she first began looking for work, she’d tell prospective employers about her education and her different work experiences.

“I just tried to sell myself,” she said. “But you get a vibe at the beginning of the interview.”

Advice from the Nebraska Vocational Rehabilitation program helped.

“They suggested that I tell employers on the phone that I am a little person and that I walk with a cane,” she said. “That did seem to help, and it has made me a lot more comfortable.”

In 2001, Stubbendick joined Little People of America, a non-profit organization that provides support and information to people of short stature and their families.

While at Shriner’s Hospital in the Twin Cities, Stubbendick was connected with a pen pal, a girl in California who had the same diseases and was around the same age. The two began to exchange letters and even got to meet one another when Stubbendick and her parents went to San Francisco one summer about seven years ago for the Little People of America National Conference.

“The interesting thing is that two people can have the same diseases, but both aren’t necessarily little people,” Stubbendick said. “The California girl is around six feet tall.”

Stubbendick said she lives a relatively normal life with her dog Oreo. She’s lived in her current home nearly seven years. She drives, thanks to pedal extensions, and she’s had a scooter for about three years. Still, she gets a few stares when she’s out in public.

“If people don’t know me, they may feel sorry for me,” she said. “My friends treat me like anybody else.”

Stubbendick has her moments when she doesn’t look at the world through rose-colored glasses. But those days are few and far between. And she’s content with her job at Cabela’s call center. In fact, it’s been her favorite place to work. However, Stubbendick said one day she’d like to use more of the skills she acquired while attending SCC.

“I always wanted to be a nurse,” she said. “So I went for the medical office technology instead. It would be fun to work in a hospital someday.”

SCC receives \$2.3 million for green construction training

SCC plans to use a \$2.3 million stimulus grant to train 400 disadvantaged people to work in energy efficiency construction. "It's exciting to have an opportunity to lead people in that direction," SCC President Jack Huck said of the training the college will provide. Participants will include unemployed workers, veterans, high school dropouts, people with criminal records, refugees and immigrants. The money comes from the labor department's Pathways Out of Poverty grant program, designed to help disadvantaged people become self-sufficient. SCC's grant was one of 38 worth \$150 million awarded across the country. SCC plans to use the money to teach eight green construction courses, as well as basic communications and employability skills. Computer training, vocational ESL classes, adult education, and job skills workshops will be offered and will prepare participants to work in construction, carpentry, roofing, electrical, plumbing, and sheet metal. Training will take place in a 10,000 square foot space SCC will lease in the Center for People in Need's newly expanded facility at 3901 N. 27th Street in Lincoln.

CDC awarded grant

SCC's Child Development Center has been awarded the Childcare Access Means Parents in School grant from the U.S. Education Department. The \$250,204 grant allows the college to extend services to help Pell Grant eligible student parents with children of all ages.

Human services recognition

The SCC Human Services program was recently honored by The Lincoln/Lancaster Homeless Coalition at the 10th Annual Hunger and Homeless Recognition event in November 2009. The program was recognized for having significant impact on homeless issues in Lancaster County. Selection was made based upon exceptional commitment and/or creativity in serving the homeless population of Lincoln/Lancaster County. Congratulations to the Human Services program for its outstanding contribution to Lincoln's homeless!!

NPPD presents scholarships at SCC

SCC's scholarship fund received a boost when members of Nebraska Public Power District's board presented checks to SCC campus directors. Gary Thompson and Ken Kunze presented checks for \$3,737 each to SCC's three campus directors during the college's board of governors meeting in Lincoln. Bob Morgan, director of distance learning/Beatrice Campus director; Jeanette Volker, vice president for student services/Lincoln Campus director; and Lyle Neal, vice president for



From left: Ken Kunze, NPPD board; Jeanette Volker, SCC vice president for student services/Lincoln Campus director; Lyle Neal, SCC vice president for technology/Milford Campus director; Gary Thompson, NPPD board; and Bob Morgan, SCC director of distance learning/Beatrice Campus director.

technology/Milford Campus director, accepted the checks. The checks were in addition to the \$733 each campus recently received, bringing NPPD's 2009 contribution to SCC to \$13,410. "Many students come out of the community college system and work for us," said Thompson, an NPPD Board member since 1993.

Kunze, completing his first year on the NPPD Board, shared a success story about a woman who attended SCC, completed a bachelor's degree at Nebraska Wesleyan University, became a registered nurse, earned a master's degree from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and now works in Weeping Water. Kunze said scholarship dollars helped her finance her education.

Proceeds from the Wells Fargo Nebraska PGA Open golf tournament, endorsed and operated by the Nebraska Section of the PGA and the Nebraska Golf Association and coordinated by NPPD, are donated to the Nebraska Community College Foundation.

Student success stories:

2008: "Shortly after graduating from the Human Services program in December 2008, I was able to gain employment with the state of Nebraska Developmental Disabilities as a Service Coordinator. I now work to facilitate residential and vocational services for people with a wide variety of developmental disabilities. Getting my education from SCC helps me immensely in my day to day job activities, not only did SCC allow me to get on the job experience through field placements but I use the skills I learned in class every day."

Josh Turner, Human Services
SCC-Lincoln

1984: “I was several years out of high school when I realized I needed to pursue a career and not just another unskilled job. The best decision I ever made was taking evening classes at SCC. It was hard work as I also worked full-time during the days. I am currently employed as an Electronics Technician for Kohlman Systems Research, a small company that performs flight testing all over the world. SCC helped me get this job twenty-five years ago!”

Randy Myers, Electronic Technology
SCC-Lincoln

2005: “I am very happy with my Accountant position with the BryanLGH Heart Institute and would not have qualified for this job without SCC and the wonderful faculty. Susan Pallas was an exceptional instructor! Thanks SCC.”

Samantha Scott, Business Administration
SCC-Lincoln

2000: “As a chef, you always remember your roots! SCC planted the seed that enabled me to become not only a chef, but a restaurateur in the hospitality industry. I currently work as an Executive Sous Chef at two locations, scape and crepes: etc, within the Maryland Plaza Restaurants in St. Louis, Mo. You can visit the sites at scapestl.com. The SCC instructors are dedicated to the development of their students from day one.”

Justin Wacker, Food Service/Hospitality
SCC-Lincoln