Citizen of the Month: Firefighter advocates for burn victims

26-year-old South King firefighter badly burned in a car accident when she was 4 now helps other victims

BY ANDREW FICKES
For the Mirror

All along her left leg, Mickey McLain still has a visible scar — a reminder of the horrific car accident she experienced at age 4 that resulted in third-degree burns.

"I have scars on my back where they took skin to put on the injury on my left leg," said McLain, who the Mirror selected as October's Citizen of the Month. "My burn was caused by impact, not necessarily by heat."

When she was 7, McLain started attending Camp Eyabsut in North Bend, a week-long summer camp focused on providing a safe place for burn victims ages 7-17 to socialize and heal emotionally.

"Definitely meeting kids with scars gave me some comfort knowing that other kids had scars like me," McLain said.

She remembers making friends with a girl at the camp who helped her put the compression garments on her burn.

"It wasn't a big deal for her," McLain said.

Today, at age 26, McLain is a firefighter for South King Fire and Rescue at Station 62 in Federal Way. A huge passion of hers is volunteering as a counselor at Camp Eyabsut, where she mentors youth who are coming to terms with their burn injuries and learning new ways to cope.

Eyabsut is a Skagit Indian word meaning rise above anything.

"It's important to restore kids' confidence," McLain said. "I see kids on day one come in with pants. By day two they have a swimsuit on. The burn camp provides a real safe place where they can be themselves and do activities like a normal kid."

Children at the camp are exposed to activities like swimming, archery and a rock wall. There is a dance for the youth and high school-age students can go on an off-site trip. Last summer, the older youth went to Wild Waves for the day.

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Mickey McLain

"She is a quiet, hard worker, who is super humble," said Capt. Jeff Bellinghausen, community relations officer for South King Fire and Rescue. "It's neat to see her recognized."

Bellinghausen said South King Fire hired McLain three years ago.

"She's been a great employee and great in the community," Bellinghausen said. "She's been a big part of the (South King Fire) firefighters foundation. When Mickey joined (South King Fire) she brought a passion for burn victims and stepped up the firefighters' role in the burn camps to a point where we've become sponsors through her leadership."



Mickey McLain, right, has enjoyed her time mentoring Bryanna Roseen, left, who at age 9 was burned in a house fire. McLain is the Mirror's Citizen of the Month for October. *Courtesy of Mickey McLain*

citizen of the month sponsored by Jimmy Mac's Roadhouse Steaks & Crabcakes Peanuts on the floor

Bellinghausen said during the past two years, about a dozen firefighters from South King Fire have gone up for the day to Camp Eyabsut to cook and serve lunches for the youth.

"Mickey goes up for the entire week (at the end of July) as a counselor," Bellinghausen said. "Mickey makes all the arrangements to go to the camp. We do shift trades. She clears all her own time and doesn't get any special days. She finances her trips to events. She sees this as her mission in life to help others."

One trip McLain financed and planned the time for was a week-long visit in September to the International Association of Firefighters-hosted burn camp in Washington, D.C. McLain, along with 15-year-old burn victim Bryanna Roseen, were chosen to represent Camp Eyabsut. The North Bend camp serves youth from Washington, Oregon, Montana, Idaho and Alaska.

"Bry is a confident kid," McLain said. "She was burned (in a house fire) when she was 9. She came to the burn camp right after her injury. She has always known that there were others like her.

"It's definitely a lot of fun to stand on the outside and watch the process she goes through," McLain said. "It's fun to watch her confidence grow and watch her get more comfortable in her own skin. It's like looking in a mirror, knowing that I was once where she is at now."

McLain and Roseen were two of about 40 counselors and kids to attend the week-long camp in the nation's capital. The group visited the Lincoln Memorial, the Washington Monument, Mount Vernon and other national landmarks. One of the highlights was dinner with the president of the International Association of Firefighters.

"It was great to meet firefighters that had the same passion as me, to see kids from all over and to know that there is a larger issue that a lot of kids are going through everywhere," McLain said.

After returning from D.C., it wasn't too long after that McLain flew out of state to Indianapolis to attend the World Burn Congress, hosted by the Phoenix Society, and learn about how to counsel people and firefighters who have been burned.

In some way, throughout the years, McLain is always advocating for burn victims. Christmas is a special time that McLain takes to make young burn victims feel special. Past Christmas parties have been at Wild Waves and Pattison's West skating rink.

"The firefighters association sponsored us for the first year," McLain said. "This year I got the Washington State Firefighter Council to pay half."

McLain is especially grateful for her colleagues at South King Fire for their support.

"She is a tremendous firefighter," Bellinghausen said. "She does her job with great professionalism."

Citizen of the Month

Nominate someone for the Mirror's Citizen of the Month by emailing the person's name, contact information and why they should be selected to editor@federalwaymirror.com.

FREE FORUM AT VIRGINIA MASON NOV. 3

Virginia Mason Federal Way Medical Center will host an informational forum about Medicare Advantage Plans starting at 6 p.m. on Tuesday, Nov. 3 at the center, located at 33501 First Way S. The event is free and open to everyone.

The forum will be telecast live from Virginia Mason Hospital in Seattle. Medicare Advantage Plans, sometimes called "Part C" or "MA Plans," are offered by private companies approved by Medicare. Learn more at www.medicare.gov.

Contact and submissions:
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Community members look at Camelot Elementary memorabilia during the school's recent 50th anniversary. *Courtesy of Federal Way Public Schools*

Camelot celebrates 50 years

FROM STAFF REPORTS

Camelot Elementary recently celebrated its 50th anniversary featuring a public event with scrapbooks and memorabilia from the last 50 years on display.

Camelot banners and shields made by current students decorated the school. A short program featured Superintendent Tammy Campbell and three previous principals, Paul Marquardt, Sharon Stenerson and Mike Nelson, as well as current principal Cindy Dracobly. Attendees also enjoyed the presentation of shields, a memory slide show and the opportunity to greet staff and students from today and yesterday. As part of the festivities, Dracobly shared the contents of a time capsule that originated in 1965 when the building was built.

One highlight was a former student who read her writing assignment "Camelot 25 Years From Now," which was added to the school's time capsule in 1990 during the 25th anniversary. Her predictions that "garbage cans will come to us," "at recess we will go swimming" and "if it is still standing we might have [skyscrapers] a couple of stories high," may not have come true, but many others did.