

Maryland Medevac Crew Honored at Memorial

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ROANOKE, Va. -- The mother of a Maryland State Police trooper killed last year when his helicopter crashed said it was difficult to find the right words to describe her experience this past weekend at the National EMS Memorial Service.

Wilma Lippy traveled to Roanoke to honor her son, Mickey, a flight medic; Steve Bunker, the pilot, and EMT Tonya Mallard.

"It was interesting talking to other families who are experiencing the same thing I am," she said.

On Saturday afternoon at a luncheon for the families of fallen EMS heroes, she joined two young men who lost their stepfather, an organ donation specialist, in a plane crash.

"I am not the only one hurting," she said as she looked back on the weekend events hosted by EMS volunteers from across the country. "There are many people here feeling the same pain."

Lippy said survivors need the opportunity to share memories, to talk about their feelings with those in similar situations.

"I really thank the EMS people for this gathering. It was very helpful..."

Lippy said there have been a number of unusual circumstances since her son's death.

When she went to find his name on the wall at the National Law Enforcement Memorial, she was stunned to see it was on 51. "That's the number on the football jerseys he wore both in high school and college," she said. "Can you believe that?"

But the strange coincidences don't end there.

On Friday, after escorting bicyclists with the National EMS Memorial Bike Ride to their final destination at Hotel Roanoke, the troopers parked their cruisers in the semi-circle at the entrance.

The following morning they saw the names of Lippy and Mallard printed in chalk on the ground right beside the lead cruiser. After moving the car, they saw Bunker's name as well.

"That was pretty incredible," said Trooper First Class Eric Smothers.

But, it didn't quite end there either.

When the president of the bike ride heard what happened, her eyes widened. "No way. Children were handed chalk and heroes' names to write them in the driveway," said Jennifer Frenette. "We don't try group people together. It's strictly random,"

On Sunday morning, Lippy took a deep breath and stepped up to talk to more than 100 fellow survivors. Her stories about her son brought smiles, laughs and lots of tears..

"We realized when Mickey was about three that his future would involve the medical field. He severed an artery in his arm after putting it through a storm door..." Some laughed, some wiped tears as she described how her son chose a Pink Panther as his patient, and a TV stand on wheels as the gurney.

"Not long ago," she added, "We opened a box to find a number of GI Joes missing arms and legs. They obviously also had been Mickey's patients..."

Lippy said despite his endeavors including playing football on a scholarship, Mickey's first love was the medical field and helping others.

"He would stop at nothing," the proud mother said.

He became a paramedic, and eventually hired by the Maryland State Police. "He was doing what he loved. He was so happy. He had a four-month-old daughter he adored."

Since the crash that occurred in bad weather while the crew was transporting two patients from a car wreck, she has testified before the Maryland legislature and attended NTSB hearings.

Lippy encouraged Maryland lawmakers to keep the medevac program, and fund it appropriately.

Since the fatal crash, the Lippy family has grown. Trooper First Class Carl Hardcastle, and his wife, Karen, have developed a close bond with them.

For Hardcastle, also a flight medic, it's a connection that can't be defined.

In the past few months, they've cried together and laughed together. They're helping one another through the grieving process.

Hardcastle said he now thinks of Wilma as Mom. "She is one incredible lady," he said.

This past weekend, fellow members of the MSP aviation command accompanied Lippy to Roanoke to pay their respects to their colleagues and the EMT also killed in the crash.

The troopers -- dressed in their brown Class A uniforms -- stood out in the sea of blue.

Hardcastle escorted Lippy to receive a medal, a flag and white rose. The others stood at attention during the presentations for their colleagues and EMT Mallard.

Assistant Aviation Commander Capt. Dan Cornwell accepted the items for Bunker's family who was attending a graduation this past weekend.

The troopers joined other uniformed personnel in a final salute as two helicopters from Virginia flew overhead.