



# Health Matters

Spring 2013

Health and Wellness Information for Our Community



## Clinic Hours

Lopez Island Medical Clinic is located in Lopez Village at 103 Washburn Place.

Clinic hours:  
Monday–Friday,  
8:30 am– 5:00 pm

To schedule an appointment, call 468-2245 during regular hours.

Medical emergency?  
Dial 911.

[www.lopezisland-medical.org/](http://www.lopezisland-medical.org/)

## Health Matters

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## High Drama Meets Local Skill

**M**arch 7, 2013, 12:32 a.m.  
*Naval Search and Rescue receives a call: 44-year-old man has suffered a heart attack. Bad weather has aborted evacuation attempts, patient's life in danger. Naval assist requested.*

*Emergency Ops swings into action: Navy flight surgeon assesses and approves the need for the flight. Six Naval crewmembers, roused from their beds, head for the airfield. On the pad, another team readies the MH-60S Knighthawk helicopter.*

*1:30 a.m. Lt. Dylan Beyer, aircraft commander, lifts off with his 5-man crew. Weather conditions are poor.*

*1:45 a.m. Knighthawk lands on the island airstrip. The scream of its jet-propelled engines and rotor blast fills the night. A Navy corpsman, in full gear and night goggles, jumps onto the tarmac and, bending low under the rotating blades, runs to the waiting ambulance.*

A movie thriller? Actually, it's the final hours of an EMS rescue on Lopez this winter.

With the tranquility of island life, it's easy to miss the behind-the-scenes efforts that keep us safe. Emergency care here requires complicated, intricate cooperation and fast action. Typically, when mainland 911 responders receive a call their goal is to assess the problem and, if necessary, load the patient into an ambulance and provide transport to the nearest hospital ER. "Out here we don't have that luxury," says long-time Lopez Paramedic Marty Clark.

Island emergency care can be severely hampered by our lack of cell phone coverage and harsh weather. Both figured prominently in this story where, even for Lopez 911 respond-



**Buddies for Life.** Paramedic Marty Clark, Fire Chief Jim Ghiglione and Dr. Bob Wilson lead emergency care on Lopez Island

ers, the night's events held high drama. In addition to Lopez EMTs and Paramedic, Lopez Fire, Lopez Clinic, Lopez Law Enforcement, NAS Whidbey Island and San Juan County Sheriff's Dispatch, some 40 Lopez volunteers left their beds that cold, rain-soaked night to help.

Bobby Burnette, 44, tells his story. "I started having symptoms at about 6 o'clock at night: pain and tingling in my forearm. It went up my left arm into my chest area (was it heart-burn?) then up the artery in my neck. I didn't call immediately because the month before I'd been flown off for similar symptoms that turned out to be pneumonia. I thought maybe this time it would go away, but I just couldn't get comfortable. Finally around 11 p.m. I asked a neighbor to call 911."

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# High Drama Meets Local Skill

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On the scene, Marty made the assessment: possible heart attack in progress; airlift to St. Joseph's Hospital, Bellingham necessary.

Liz Malinoff, EMT Lieutenant, alerts St. Joe's that a patient with heart attack in progress is coming by helicopter; then calls Airlift Northwest requesting transport.

The next adrenalin-pumping details stand in sharp contrast to the calm professionalism of those telling the story: Paramedic Marty Clark, Fire Chief Jim Ghiglione and Dr. Bob Wilson.

Marty: "At this point, we have Bobby in the back of the rig. We're on a dirt road on our way to the airport. The ambulance is basically our emergency room."

Nicole O'Bryant, EMT, is monitoring Bobby, taking vitals, charting notes. Bobby's eyes roll back. He loses consciousness. Marty, watching the gauges hooked to the leads on Bobby's chest, sees his heart stop. Nicole checks his pulse. Nothing. She begins CPR compressions on his chest. Three EMTs, following in private vehicles, jump in the ambulance to assist. Marty shocks the patient's heart back to life. Bobby regains consciousness, unaware of what has taken place.

Minutes later, Airlift Northwest aborts: bad weather makes landing impossible. New transport is needed. Sam Fowler, ambulance driver/firefighter/student EMT, radios Jim Pruitt, San Juan Dispatch, to find another option.

With transport now unknown, Marty redirects the ambulance to the clinic. Dispatch calls Dr. Wilson to meet the team there. Fire chief Jim Ghiglione, monitoring 911 in route to the airport, turns around and heads to the clinic.

12:31 a.m. At the clinic, Dr. Wilson, Marty and the team work to keep Bobby alive. "The first hour is called the golden hour with a heart attack. Time is muscle. The longer you wait to call, the more heart muscle you lose," says Dr. Wilson. In this case, everyone was working fast.

1:03 a.m. A *second* 911 page call comes over the radio: female lost in the woods on the south end of Lopez.

Jim Ghiglione: "Stuart Post takes command and about 30 firefighters head out to start the search."

NAS Whidbey approves dispatch of MH-60S Knighthawk rescue helicopter to Lopez Island.

Bobby is transported by ambulance to Lopez airport where Dr. Wilson and the team continue care until the helicopter lands. There another complication arises: the attending Navy corpsman, lacking specific experience with the medications administered, asks Marty to join the flight team to St. Joe's.

Touchdown in Bellingham. Cardiologist and staff are waiting. Within minutes of arrival, the blood clot is removed from Bobby's right coronary artery. In the Intensive Care Unit, Bobby responds well.

Marty is offered an empty hospital bed where she sleeps a few hours then catches an Island Air flight home to Lopez at 10 a.m.

And the second 911 call? "It turned out very well," reports Jim. "The woman was found by law enforcement. I can't say it was a typical night on Lopez but emergency aid calls and fire calls happen when they happen. We're prepared 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. It's what we do. We make it look seamless but it takes a lot of great work to get great results."

Marty: "That's how emergency service happens here, everyone assists. We have other partners. Cathy Doherty is great, especially in women's situations like childbirth. Marge and Rick will open the pharmacy any hour of the day or night to provide meds and give us medication lists if we're sending a patient off. The police are terrific partners, too."



**Lifesaving crew with Bobby L to R front row: Fire Chief Jim Ghiglione, EMT Lieutenant Liz Malinoff, Bobby Burnette, Dr. Bob Wilson, EMT Tommer Rousch; Back: Paramedic Marty Clark, EMT Nicole O'Bryant. Not shown, David Rypinski, EMT, and Sam Fowler, student EMT**

Bobby: "I can remember them putting me into the Navy helicopter. I wouldn't be here without the care I got. If I wasn't so stubborn I would have called earlier. I would recommend, if you aren't sure, call 911. Don't wait. That's what they're here for." His gentle smile relays deep emotion. "I just want to thank everyone for the help. I wouldn't be here now, except for them. I never took one day at a time. All of a sudden I got stopped in my tracks. I'm trying hard to change what I do every day to make sure I'll stick around for a while. If my story helps just one person, it's worth it."

# New Lopez Paramedic Enjoys Service & Adventure

When Lopez Island's newest paramedic isn't answering an aid call, you might find him shushing down a black diamond ski slope, playing the bagpipes or soaring updraft currents above Puget Sound in his paraglider.

Meet Travis Potter, age 27.

When asked about his hours aloft, Travis snaps open his laptop and punches up a dramatic video taken just last weekend: miles of sunny northwest beaches unfold far below his soaring glider. "Basically, I strap myself to a kite, run hard and lift into the wind. Flights can take from 10 minutes to 2 hours. It's an absolute blast; peaceful, quiet and calm."

Quite the counterpoint to his life in emergency medicine.

Travis' adventures began early. Growing up in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, he joined the Silver Mountain ski patrol in junior high. His first job out of high school was as a Mountain Bike Patroler in Colorado where his patrol partner was a retired fire fighter from Denver, one of the first six women in America to join the professional firefighters' union. "She inspired me to be a firefighter," he says.

After living in a fire station while earning his two-year Paramedic degree, Travis went on to complete his college studies for dual certification as a firefighter. He became a volunteer paramedic in Moscow, Idaho while pursuing more college studies then got his first paid job as a Firefighter/Paramedic in Hayden, Idaho at age 20.

But the wide world beckoned. "Working in my hometown was great, but I'd lived there my whole life. I wanted something new." In January 2011 he moved to Friday Harbor to become a Paramedic. Good decision? "Sure! Just look out the window at this beautiful place," he says. "I love the islands. It's the best of all worlds."

There was just one problem. "I missed the big red fire truck!" Travis says.

The plot thickens.

In the meanwhile, Lopez islander Caleb Pal, a buddy from college days, was beginning Paramedic training at Harborview Hospital in Seattle. Once certified, Caleb will replace Marty Clark when she retires in late 2013.



Travis Potter, Lopez Island's newest Paramedic

At about that same time, additional staffing changes were afoot: the Fire Department funded a third paramedic position. Travis applied and was hired in October, 2012. By the end of 2013, both young men will join Tracie Red Elk on the Lopez Paramedic team.

Lopez is a great match for Travis; the daily challenges of the job and the opportunity to be of service are a winning combination. "When I was a kid, my dad made artificial arms and legs for people, especially veterans. I grew up hearing stories about the people he was helping." Travis likes having the time to provide more care than on the mainland where the main job of a paramedic is often limited to triage and transport to the nearest emergency room. A new term,

Community Paramedicine, describes that kind of rural care. "For instance, one thing we can do is look for ways to help prevent future problems once we're in the home. I find that part of the job as satisfying as the high-energy stuff. It could be as simple as identifying an unsecured rug as a tripping hazard."

"Travis is a wonderful addition to our EMS team, says Marty. "With his experience on San Juan Island, he fits right in. He knows how emergency care works in our remote location and is serving us well."

## Will You be Charged for a 911 Call?

Some islanders, worried they will be charged for ambulance and medical care during a 911 call, drive themselves to the clinic as a cost-saving measure. That decision could not only delay crucial life-saving measures, it is not accurate. According to the Lopez Fire Department, residents are not charged for services provided during a 911 call. If a resident has insurance, their carrier will be billed but residents themselves don't pay.

While money isn't a factor, time is. Travis: "Don't delay. Make the 911 call and let us come to you. Lifesaving is what we are trained to do."

Editor's note: Residents are not charged because emergency medical services are funded by our local taxes. Visitors are charged for 911 calls.

# Health Matters

Catherine Washburn Medical Association  
P.O. Box 309 • Lopez, WA 98261



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## CWMA ANNUAL MEETING

Sat, May 18  
10:00 AM  
Lopez library

*All  
Welcome*

# Neighbors Helping Neighbors

In a time of shrinking resources, San Juan County is writing a success story by offering mental health counseling to the uninsured. The Lopez Family Resource Center (LIFRC) administers the county-wide Community Wellness Program for Lopez Island.

The program provides counseling to uninsured individuals, couples, families and children. Those who qualify can have up to 12 sessions per year with a co-pay of \$5 - \$30, based on income level.

“People tell us how appreciative they are of this help,” says LIFRC Director Celia Marquis. “To be able to offer mental health counseling is fantastic. Last year we saw 20 individuals and couples. This year we have already seen 11 people and there is a waiting list. For me, this is one of the best programs we have.”

Until this program came on line, the LIFRC’s hands were tied. “People would come in with serious issues, but we couldn’t refer them to counselors because we had no funding. Now all that has changed. It’s made a huge difference in how we support islanders.”

Here’s how the program works. The LIFRC contracts with six Lopez therapists, two therapists on Orcas Island and a third in Friday Harbor to provide mental health counseling for those who qualify. Why Orcas and Friday Harbor? Some people want more privacy; they’d like to see their therapist in the office, not in the grocery store. It’s a system that works well.



Diane Letchworth, licensed marriage and family therapist, has been offering counseling since the program began three years ago. “People who otherwise would not have access to

experienced, licensed therapists are now able to work on various issues. Problems such as depression, anxiety, grief and parenting have been addressed with positive results.”

How do Lopez folks take advantage of this service? Some are referred by Lopez Clinic, others by the Senior Center (a percentage of the funds are allocated for folks 60 years and older) but most contact the LIFRC directly. If you’re interested, call the LIFRC at 468-4117. Staff is trained to help and all calls and contacts are confidential.