2020 A Salute to People in Our Community Who Make a Difference

Snohomish's Sammie Davis fights forest fires nationally



Sammie Davis assists the Bitterroot Hotshots with a backburn on the Cameron Peak Fire in Colorado in August.

By JAKE BERG

"Seeing 12-foot flames around you, it's like your body wants to hold up in a corner by the house, but the thing is, there's nowhere to go, and I cannot describe that feeling to you where all your body wants to do is just try to find a little place to hide and find shelter and there isn't anywhere to go, you just have to sit and wait and try to stay calm," Snohomish's Sammie Davis said as she remembered one of the scariest moments of her life.

Davis has spent the last four fire seasons traveling across the country fighting fires, often for weeks at a time. 2020 was her longest season to date, spending 45 days in the field.

Forest fires have gotten considerably worse in the last decade, every year seeming more destructive than the last. 2020 again broke records records set in 2019. From the start of the year to Oct. 16, over 46,000 fires across the western US blazed through 8.3 million acres, destroying homes, towns and claiming many lives.

Davis has lived in Boise for the last 5 years and got into wildland fire fighting out of boredom. Although a successful sous chef, Davis wasn't content with that lifestyle.

"I liked it but I wanted something more, I'm kind of that way," Davis said.

In 2016, Davis joined the PatRick Corporation, a private company out of Boise that deploys crews to fires based on contracts. In her first year, she was on a handcrew of about 20 to 30 people fighting fires in Oregon, ture, and we're doing every-Idaho, Montana and Utah.

It's hard not to notice the environment changing around you, the seasons are getting crazier and the fires are more intense, Davis said.

While working on the handcrew she set fire lines, digging into the ground and removing brush and debris to stop the fire from spreading further. Hand-crews also do mop-up's and cold trailing, which is walking the "black" or already burned areas to suppress hot spots.

California to the list of states she's fought fires in. Davis nve or six.

lying on your brothers and Davis said the crew had to laughed. sisters next to you," she said.

A wildland engine crew does many of the same things that a hand-crew does but because they have water and an engine they have more for forest fires, breaking the responsibilities. Engine crews also assist backburns; controlled burns lit in the path of a forest fire to eliminate combustible material.

> While working on the Cameron Peak Fire, Colorado's second largest wildfire in history, Davis and her crew were assisting with a backburn near some houses, putting out spot fires and setting firelines. Davis said all of a sudden the wind changed direction and the crew lost control of the fire.

"When we lose control of like an adrenaline junkie in a fire our main concern becomes protecting structures," Davis said. "At that point, it's kind of like cowboy firefighting, you know, you have no plan. It's when you're training and your skills kind of take over."

"So we jump on the structhing we can. And we have like 60 mph winds coming through. And that is just probably the worst situation you could ask for," she said.

Fires are unpredictable and things can turn life-threatening in a matter of minutes, which was exactly the situation Davis found herself in only a few months ago.

"We're trying to hold the house, the trees are torching and the fire is spreading from the trees down (the) tall grass. And we had to im-After her first season, she mediately get out of it, we felt joined an engine crew and that our engine could make has been on it ever since, it out, so we go down to the adding Colorado, Nevada and next structure below us to try to hold that. Well, we're there. We're putting line down, we're said working on an engine wetting the grass, anything crew is more enjoyable be- we can do. We did become cause instead of 20 people, it's surrounded by flames, and if the house caught fire, we were views are great but the money

backburn beside the house to burn a path away from it. "Yeah, once you're at that point, and there's fire all around you, you just have to hunker down and wait for the fire to pass," she added.

Situations like this are what wildland firefighters train for but hope they never find themselves in.

"My eyes looked like they were bleeding," she said. "I couldn't, I mean there's so much smoke that you can barely breathe and you cannot see because your eyes just will not stop watering. And there's nothing, nothing is going to stop that from messing with your body. So not only are your insides just kind of churning, you lose your senses. It's truly terrifying."

Davis said she had to keep her composure for her crew next to her while being on the verge of death.

"You know, your instincts are going nuts, fire is very primitive to us, and normals kind of freak out and want to run away. It takes everything in you to remain calm," she said.

Luckily the water laid down by the crew and backburn helped hold the fire. Davis said the flames were probably 20 yards away and if there were more tall trees in the area it would have got too hot and she probably would have not made it out.

Despite a handful of scary moments, the majority of the job is rewarding according to Davis. The bonds she has made with her crew, the satisfaction of serving the community and preserving the wilderness she cares so much about, makes the job worth it for her. She added that the job pays pretty well too.

"Don't get me wrong, the "It's like a family, you're regoing to be out of luck." is fantastic," Davis said as she

Local nonprofits get produce from farms to families

MILLIONS OF POUNDS OF FOOD

By JAKE BERG

organization has once again several farms of its own. facilitated an abundance of

tor of Everett, Farmer Frog to the plate. was born from necessity. In late April, potato and Following the last economic onion farmers in Othello, downfall in 2008, leaving Washington, had a surplus of millions unemployed, Olivia crops. The onions were going Park Elementary School in to spoil and the potatoes were south Everett wanted to start going to be plowed under the

then, Farmer Frog has grown into much more, supporting over a dozen school gardens, The Farmer Frog nonprofit and it is currently developing

When COVID-19 created food to families during a time the largest unemployment when many are in dire need. rates since the Great Depres-Founded by Zsofia Pasz-sion, Farmer Frog stepped up

a community garden to help fields for next year. Bothell

grew up in Othello, sought and third member Nancy help to distribute the crops.

"On April 30, we were asked multiple community gardens if we could have people who are going out to the Othello area to pick up some potatoes," Pasztor said. "So we said yes and on May 1, we had the first load coming in that was a little over 12,000 pounds of potatoes and some

> The challenge then was distribution. After making a few phone calls, Pasztor had donation claims to all 12,000 pounds by 7 p.m.

Due to the overwhelming 21 states," Pasztor said. "As of

families battle hunger. Since resident George Ahearn, who response, Ahearn, Pasztor Oct. 25, we have distributed the country gets distributed Balin cofounded the nonprofit EastWest Food Rescue to continue doing similar food rescue work.

"(EastWest Food Rescue) is an organization that was essentially born out of COVID," Pasztor said.

The size of Farmer Frog and its partnerships with distributors made a synergetic relationship with EastWest Food Rescue. In a matter of months, the EastWest nonprofit went national.

"Now we are operating in

over 18 million pounds of food and helped close to 2 million people."

During the peak of their operation in mid-summer, EastWest Food Rescue was moving around 300,000 pounds of fresh produce a week. As of Oct. 28, Snohomish County has received more than 340,000 pounds.

The food is distributed through a network of partnerships Farmer Frog has created over the years. According to Pasztor, the food collected, donated, and purchased from farms across

to various places throughout the 21 states where EastWest operates, such as multiple Native American tribes, food banks, and other organizations equipped to give families access to food. EastWest also contributes to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Farmers to Families Foodbox Program.

"It's not myself, it's not George, it's not any of us individually," Pasztor said. "It's an effort that the community is putting forward finding solutions to end this crisis right now."

Monroe police K-9 Sam assists in large drug bust

By JAKE BERG

MONROE — Monroe Police narcotics K-9 Sam had the largest find of his three-year career with partner Officer Devin Tucker while assisting the Everett Police Department in the search of a vehicle this spring.

Five-year-old Sam alerted the on-scene officers that the vehicle contained illegal substances. The contents of the vehicle included two kilos of heroin, 900 M-30 pills (suspected fentanyl pills), 100 grams of methamphetamine, one handgun, one rifle, \$22,487 in cash, drug sale equipment and drug paraphernalia.

The occupants of the vehicle fled the scene. The individuals in the vehicle had prior drug history, prior history with drug manufacturing, and delivering illegal



Photo courtesy Monroe Police

K-9 Sam and Officer Devin Tucker.

narcotics. Because narcotics were suspected, a K-9 unit of the Snohomish County was required to search the dogs."

mote when they're calling are to allow other K-9 units out is, Sam can do things to watch each other's dogs

he's an incredible animal," Tucker said.

Sam doesn't live the life of a normal dog. He works three days on, three days off in a single work "set," with his partner and owner, Officer Tucker. During a set, Officer Tucker and K-9 Sam get in a minimum of four hours of train-

"We are pretty good at scheduling full days that are just devoted to canine work," Tucker said. "We have regional training groups that get together, it's a lot

Officer Tucker explained "The big thing I try to pro- that the goal of the events

humans can't do, and allows for other officers are trained to search for to hide "the find" so the offi- controlled substances and cer and his K-9 partner can signal them with a passive truly practice and train for alert. real situations.

> Although because an offia sit and stare alert," Tucker cer's job is so unpredictable, said. "They'll just kind of oftentimes Officer Tucker sit and almost turn into has to perform training ex- a statue and stare where ercises with K-9 Sam in the the best source of odor is

Police K-9s, such as Sam,

coming from."

"Passive alert dogs will do

K-9 units are often called to assist because of the unique work done by the furry members of the police

Reserve a virtual seat for the American Red Cross Real Heroes Breakfast on Dec. 10

By TRIBUNE STAFF

shown great courage to save a life or given of — Spirit of Red Cross themselves to help an- Award and the Clare 305-4167 or email NWother person or their Waite Humanitarian events@redcross.org community will take Award — will be anfast.

place on Thursday, Dec. 10 online. The registration link is https:// e.givesmart.com/events/ forts. iA2/

by about 9 a.m.

a Real Heroes award represent the diverse facets of our community: students, community volunteers, police officers, fire every five days, more paramedics, avid hikers, than 70 times per year. moms and dads.

personal stories and be honored before an audience of 1,000 community and local government leaders, key repre- programs to over 10,000 sentatives from police, people, and trains thou-

fire, emergency and sands of people in life-

Two additional awards safety. cant positive impacts on homish-county.html The event will take our community.

> The breakfast is a fundraising event to support local disaster relief ef-

The Snohomish County The program begins chapter of the Red Cross sharply at 8 a.m. The prevents and alleviates event should conclude human suffering in the face of emergencies by The award winners for mobilizing the power of volunteers and the generosity of donors.

The local chapter responds, on average, to a Annually, the Chapter They will share their assists over 150 local families affected by fires and other local disasters, presents disaster education and preparedness

rescue services, donors saving skills such as First

For questions, call 206-

The Northwest chapcenter stage at the 26th nounced in recognition ter's website is redcross. annual American Red of acts of exemplary org/local/washington/ Cross Real Heroes Break- compassion and signifi- about-us/locations/sno-

The Snohomish County branch is headquartered Individuals who have and business executives. Aid/CPR/AED and water in Everett at 2530 Lombard Ave.

