

# HORIZONS

FORTY YEARS. ONE MISSION.

## \\ TOOLS AND TECH

OPTIMIZING INTUBATION IN  
COMPLEX SITUATIONS

## \\ COMMUNITY SUPPORT

THE TABER CHARITY AUCTION'S  
FLIGHT WITH STARS

## \\ IMPACT

THE LEGACY OF STARS FOUNDER,  
DR. GREG POWELL

## « A NEW YEAR'S RESCUE

THEO KONIDAS SHARES HIS  
LIFE-SAVING STARS EXPERIENCE

PRESENTED BY



Canadian Natural

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# WELCOME

With the seasons changing, it's worth reflecting on the momentum and milestones we've achieved together. It's been busy and rewarding — a testament to the strength of your support and the difference it makes.

The past season also brought moments of remembrance, including the loss of Dr. Greg Powell in April. As STARS' founder and visionary, his commitment continues to inspire our mission and the communities we serve. Dr. Powell helped define emergency care in Canada, and I was fortunate to call him a friend and mentor. We remain dedicated to honouring his legacy and upholding the values he championed.

Fundraising is vital to ensuring our STARS teams can be there for those who need us most. From community gatherings to fundraising success, this summer was filled with moments worth celebrating, including our Rescue events, Field of STARS, and our lottery winners. We're also grateful to the many individuals, businesses, and community groups who organized their own initiatives in support of our mission.

This year marks 40 years of STARS delivering critical care across Western Canada. From our modest beginnings in 1985, we've grown into a trusted network of skilled professionals equipped with leading-edge technology — all made possible by the generosity of the communities we serve. At the heart of that support is you. Whether

through time, advocacy, donations, or hands-on help, your commitment fuels every mission we fly.

While the seasons may change, our mission never does. We remain focused, energized, and deeply committed to the work ahead.

Thank you for your continued support, and please enjoy this fall 2025 issue of *Horizons*.

**Dr. John Froh**  
President & CEO, STARS



## **On the cover:**

Theo Konidas

**Photo by** Lyle Aspinall

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# A Parent's Nightmare Turns to Great Relief

STARS makes a critical rescue when a teenager's snowmobile ride goes wrong.

By Lyle Aspinall

In 2021, on a sunny New Year's Day, teenager Theo Konidas fired up his snowmobile for one last ride with his older brother and sister before heading home from the family cabin in Grandview, Alta.

Their dad, Lee, stayed behind, but a sense of unease soon crept in. "For some reason, something kept drawing me to go and check on the kids," he said.

He approached a snowy stubble field where he'd last heard the snowmobiles.

"First thing I saw was both the older kids, Lizzie and Yianni, standing up and screaming," said Lee. Theo was lying near a wrecked snowmobile by a tree line. His siblings had removed his helmet, revealing that his face was turning blue. Lee rushed to him through the deep snow, called 911, and ordered Lizzie to fetch their mom, Korin.

"I sent Yianni to the road so he wouldn't see his brother die," Lee said.

Guided by the 911 operator, Lee began chest compressions and rescue breathing.

Korin arrived moments later, fearing the worst.

"When I first got there, I fell apart because I did think that my child had died already,"

STARS Very Important Patient Theo Konidas (centre) with his dad Lee, mom Korin, sister Lizzie, and brother Yianni at their cottage in Grandview, Alta.



VERY IMPORTANT PATIENT





A STARS helicopter flies overhead in Grandview, Alta., near the location of Theo's accident.

Below: Theo in hospital two days following his snowmobile accident.



**"I wouldn't be here  
without STARS."**

**—THEO KONIDAS**

she said. But with calm encouragement from the 911 operator, she stepped in to help. "I could see my other two children crying, and I thought, 'I can do this. We can do this.' And everything just kind of faded away. So, it was Lee and myself working on Theo."

Soon, local emergency services arrived and set to work.

"When the 911 lady said that STARS was coming, I thought, 'Okay, we might have a chance here,'" Lee recalled.

STARS captains Tom Sliepen and Ken Ryniak were flying on that mission.

"I remember coming over the tree line and seeing one of the snowmobiles... and then the scene with Theo himself," said Tom. "I remember it quite distinctly, that chill coming over me."

Dr. Eddie Chang, medical director for STARS in Edmonton, had diverted the crew from a different mission, knowing that a young patient actively receiving chest compressions posed the greatest need.

"Theo was turning blue because he wasn't breathing and his heart probably was not beating," he said.

Flight nurse Marla Tabler remembered seeing the call details: a teenager in cardiac arrest. "Any time you're dispatched to a pediatric patient, it tugs at your heartstrings," she said.

The team's top priority was intubation — taking over Theo's breathing. An ultrasound confirmed a collapsed lung and internal bleeding. During the 18-minute flight to the Stollery Children's Hospital in Edmonton, the



Theo Konidas with Marla Tabler, the flight nurse involved in his life-saving mission, at a STARS community event.

## Loyal Support

By Lyle Aspinnall

Since recovering from his accident, Theo Konidas and his family have become active supporters of STARS – very active.

Theo has taken the lead in raising thousands of dollars for STARS through events and approaching service clubs – with his dad Lee proudly supporting him every step of the way.

“He wanted to raise \$10,000,” said Lee. “And I said, ‘I think we can do better than \$10,000; we can raise \$100,000.’ And [now] he’s almost at \$100,000, and I’m going to tell him to raise it to \$250,000. So he gives back.”

Theo is happy to do so.

“I feel really proud of the work we’re doing,” Theo said. “It means a lot to me because it feels like I’m giving back to someone who gave so much to me.”

His mom spoke directly to the many donors who have responded to Theo’s call for support:

“We’re so grateful that you choose to donate to STARS,” she said with a smile. “It’s so important because you never know if it’s going to be your family that’s out on the ice one day.”

STARS air medical crew performed a blood transfusion and worked tirelessly to maintain Theo’s breathing and blood pressure.

“The entire call, we were fighting to keep him alive,” said Marla.

And they did. Theo received the urgent care he needed and was soon on his way to a full recovery.

Now, Theo is a thriving high schooler who plays elite-level soccer. He also dedicates much of his time to supporting STARS.

“I wouldn’t be here without [STARS],” he said. “Just thinking about that and how it would have affected my parents, my family and everybody around me just really cuts deep in how thankful I am that they were there.”

Theo rides a snowmobile in winter 2025 near his family’s lakeside cottage in Grandview, Alta.



Scan the code for a video of Theo’s story.





Scene from the Bow Valley Glacier rockslide on June 19, 2025. STARS helicopters responded from both Calgary and Edmonton.

## Teamwork Amid Tragedy

Every STARS mission is unique. This one highlights the incredible collaboration between STARS and the many first-response teams that attended a mass-casualty incident in the Rockies. **By Colleen Seto**

On the afternoon of June 19, 2025, a massive rockslide took place at Bow Glacier Falls in Banff National Park, along the Icefields Parkway. In total, 13 people were successfully rescued from the scene.

An estimated 100 personnel responded to the rockfall alongside two STARS crews, including Parks Canada visitor safety specialists, RCMP, Kananaskis Mountain Rescue, Lake Louise Fire Department, Alpine Helicopters, Alberta Health Services (AHS) Emergency Medical Services (EMS), and Banff EMS.

STARS pilots conducted a thorough scene assessment, which was critical before landing. The Kananaskis Mountain Rescue team, with Alpine Helicopters, was able to fly the most critically injured patients via a long line (an extended cable attached to a stretcher) to the waiting STARS helicopters — one that was able to land at the site and the other that was staged near Bow Lake.

### An Allied Approach

Dr. Paul Tourigny was the transport physician on the STAR-1 crew that day and stayed at the site for several hours to manage patients. “Triage at the scene was challenging because of how all of the potential patients were spread out,” he explained. “Some of them could not be moved very easily.” Tourigny returned to the Calgary base at 20:20 that night.

“In remote mass casualty incidents (MCI), having the capacity to move people is important,” Tourigny emphasized. “This is where you see the value in a multi-service approach. Understanding all the resources available to you and being able to communicate with the on-scene incident commanders made this markedly easier. I cannot overstate how proud I am to have worked with all these services during this MCI. Each of them brought an essential skill set that allowed 13 people to be rescued from the scene, assessed, and offered victim services.”

PHOTOGRAPH \ N. DR. PAUL TOURIGNY, STARS PHYSICIAN LEAD, SPECIAL EDUCATION PROJECTS

"While we never want another event to happen, I'm secure in the knowledge that STARS and our allies are always working together to improve care for our patients."

—DR. PAUL TOURIGNY

## TIMELINE:

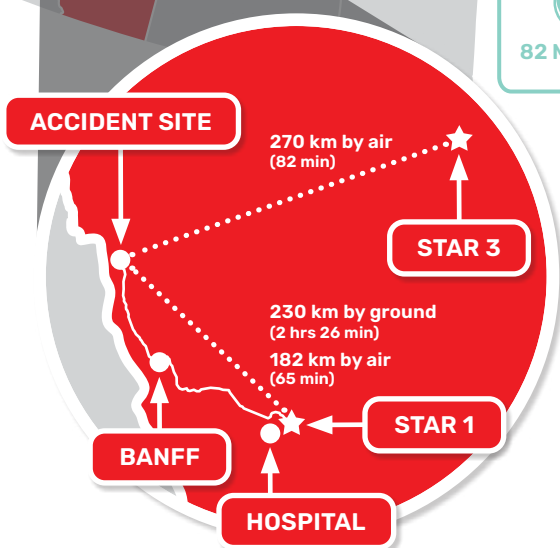
- 12:49 Rockslide occurs near Bow Glacier Falls in Banff National Park
- 12:59 911 call to Alberta Health Services (AHS) EMS Dispatch via satellite device
- 13:07 STARS requested by AHS Dispatch
- 13:10 **STAR-1 helicopter (Calgary) pre-alerted**
- 13:12 AHS EMS Dispatch collect more information – reports of multiple patients hit by rocks, some deceased, unconscious, and pinned
- 13:13 **STAR-1 dispatched**
- 13:19 **STAR-1 leaves base** with air medical crew, including Dr. Paul Tourigny, on board
- 13:22 Banff EMS picked up by Alpine 1 helicopter, responding via air; scene described as unsafe/EMS to stage
- 13:40 **STAR-3 helicopter (Edmonton) pre-alerted**
- 13:48 **STAR-3 dispatched**
- 14:02 **STAR-3 leaves base**
- 14:05 STARS Emergency Link Centre (ELC) notifies Parks Canada of **STAR-1 en route**
- 14:24 **STAR-1 lands at scene**
- 14:42 ELC calls Foothills Medical Centre (FMC) ER and confirms they are ready
- 15:13 **STAR-1 leaves scene**, Dr. Tourigny stays at scene
- 15:22 **STAR-3 lands at scene**
- 16:03 **STAR-3 leaves scene**
- 16:04 **STAR-1 lands at FMC**
- 16:33 **STAR-1 leaves FMC**
- 16:38 **STAR-1 returns to base**
- 16:45 Alpine slinging patients from incident site to staging area; EMS requests STARS remain on standby for a return to scene
- 16:54 **STAR-3 lands at FMC**
- 17:25 **STAR-3 leaves FMC**
- 17:30 **STAR-3 lands at Calgary base**
- 20:20 Dr. Tourigny returns to Calgary base



65 MINUTES



82 MINUTES



EN ROUTE



Dr. Greg Powell inside a STARS helicopter.

## A Lasting Legacy: Dr. Greg Powell

The STARS founder was a visionary game-changer.

By Kate Langille

STARS founder Dr. Greg Powell passed away peacefully at 77 years old on April 30, 2025, surrounded by his wife, Linda Powell, and their family. Dr. Powell was a visionary leader who built STARS from the ground up.

### EARLY DAYS

Born in Ontario and raised in Alberta, Dr. Powell received his medical degree from the University of British Columbia.

During his medical elective, he joined the Flying Doctor Service in Darwin, Australia, where he unexpectedly found

himself in Vietnam observing a Mobile Army Surgical Hospital. There, he witnessed rapid helicopter evacuation and participated in delivering critical care to severely injured soldiers.

Dr. Powell was passionate about aviation for his whole life. He began flight training during his medical residency at Calgary's Foothills Medical Centre, and earned his private pilot license at age 26.

### STARS IS BORN

In the late 1970s, while serving as director of emergency medicine at Foothills, Dr. Powell witnessed a gap in care for patients in rural



communities. Determined to make a change – and with the partnership of fellow physicians and Lions Club International – he combined his passion for medicine and aviation to create STARS.


In the beginning, it was very challenging. “We flew out to communities in the Lions Air Ambulance with not a shred of equipment except an oxygen bottle,” he recalled.

**A LASTING LEGACY**

Now, 40 years later, STARS maintains a fleet of 10 Airbus H145

helicopters across Western Canada and has completed more than 63,000 missions, delivering specialized nursing, paramedic, and physician care to patients in critical need – a testament to Dr. Powell’s unrelenting commitment to saving lives.

“Greg lived a big and humble life,” said Linda Powell. “It wasn’t about what he did but how he made people feel – how he changed lives.”

Dr. Powell’s legacy lives on – in every STARS flight and in every patient saved. 



Dr. Greg Powell and his wife, Linda, pose with a STARS helicopter.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ALBERTA ORDER OF EXCELLENCE

# WELCOME HOME, ORION

**STARS' new  
accredited facility dog  
is a very good boy.**

By Kate Langille



Orion poses like a good boy with a STARS helicopter.



Orion sits with flight nurses Karen Oke (left) and Andrea Rajotte at the Winnipeg STARS base.  
Below: Orion listens to his primary caregiver, Grant Therrien, from inside a STARS helicopter.

## Donors Help Support the Mental Health of the STARS Team

Ensuring access to staff training and resources for mental health and well-being is a priority at STARS. To help with this, partnerships with donors like TC Energy and its Build Strong program enables STARS team members to seek timely, professional mental health support without financial barriers. This reduces stress, increases productivity, and lowers absenteeism. Support extends beyond the workplace to team members' families, fostering work-life balance and overall family wellness.

The Peer Support Program Team empowers members to recognize signs of mental distress in colleagues and offer informed, compassionate support. In particular, support after difficult missions with emergency debrief sessions provides essential psychological first aid, supporting teams to process traumatic events, prevent long-term emotional strain, and return to work more confidently.

Orion, a three-year-old Labrador retriever, officially joined the STARS team in February 2025 as an accredited facility dog whose role is to provide emotional support to team members across the organization.

Orion came to STARS through a partnership with the Pacific Assistance Dogs Society (PADS), a highly respected Canadian organization that breeds, raises, and trains certified assistance dogs.

To ensure a great fit, PADS conducted its multi-step application review process that included two interviews with STARS and a base inspection. Following this, Grant Therrien, STARS' Manitoba provincial director and Orion's primary caregiver, underwent a week of intensive handler training in Vancouver before welcoming Orion to the Winnipeg base.

While Orion supports the whole organization, he is especially impactful for STARS' frontline staff, who regularly embark on psychologically difficult missions. When crews return to base, Orion greets them, checks in with them during the day, and provides one-on-one visits. He is also available for emotional support across all STARS bases — he'll travel whenever he is needed.

"A big success here in caring for our people is the STARS peer support team," said Therrien. "Orion can play a vital role in reducing stress and promoting emotional well-being as part of that team. His calm presence helps to boost morale and provides comfort whenever it's needed most."



"Thanks to donors like TC Energy, these initiatives allow STARS to offer a safer, more supportive workplace, demonstrating our genuine commitment to mental health and employee well-being," said Tracy Hughes, STARS human resources business partner.

Orion's ability to comfort others is the result of extensive training and an impressive command repertoire — he knows up to 20 commands tailored to his role.

"There's a command where he can 'go visit,'" explained Therrien. "He will hop on the couch and lean on the person he's visiting, providing that physical touch, that pressure contact. It's really quite relaxing."

Orion is truly the STARS team's best friend. His wagging tail, people-loving personality, and calm demeanour bring out the best in everyone he meets. He is more than a facility dog; he is a cherished member of the STARS family.

Welcome home, Orion. 🐕



# 40 YEARS, ONE MISSION

A look at how STARS expanded across Western Canada.

STARS took flight in December 1985 in Calgary — then known as Lions Air Ambulance Service — when a leased BK117 helicopter completed the first mission transporting a critically ill infant. Over the years, the service steadily expanded across Alberta: Edmonton followed in 1991 and Grande Prairie in 2006. In 2012, STARS ventured into Saskatchewan and Manitoba, opening bases in Regina, Saskatoon, and Winnipeg under government agreements. Today, STARS operates six full-time air medical bases — its growth powered by life-saving innovation and the unwavering support of allies, partners, and communities across Western Canada. ▀



**CALGARY, 1985**



**GRANDE PRAIRIE, 2006**



**SASKATOON, 2012**



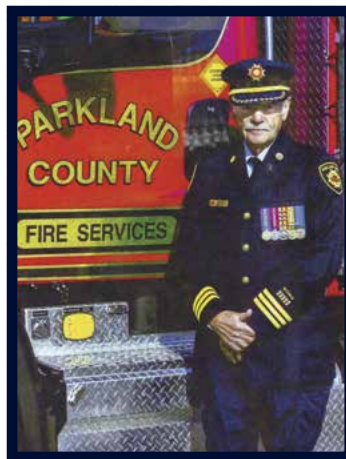
**REGINA, 2012**



**EDMONTON, 1991**



**WINNIPEG, 2012**



## **A True Ally**

**By Fabian Mayer**

"It was a small event, but it was a very important event."

That's how Bill Purdy described the Edmonton STARS base opening in 1991. Attending the event

in his then-capacity as mayor and deputy fire chief of the hamlet of Wabamun, Purdy has been a steadfast ally of STARS since day one.

With Wabamun's location about 70 kilometres west of Edmonton, Purdy knew he and the Wabamun Fire Department (now part of Parkland County Fire Department) would be involved in STARS missions. He signed up for the training to help land and support the helicopter as soon as possible, even fundraising with his department to buy the necessary equipment. With more than 60 years of experience as a firefighter in rural Alberta, Purdy knows how important the air ambulance service can be for other emergency response teams.

"It's a real asset to us because we're out there to help out and do whatever is necessary," Purdy said. "With STARS and the professional way that they do things, it really is a help in the minds of firefighters. They think, 'We know we're in good shape because we've got STARS here.'"

Purdy has been a committed supporter of STARS since the beginning — he's currently also a monthly donor. He plans to tour the Edmonton STARS base in the near future for the first time since the base opened. "I'm looking forward to comparing the tremendous advances they have made in air ambulances," Purdy said. "The quality of the people that are in the helicopter, the training, and also the quality of the helicopter itself."



# STARS PODCAST TELLS TEEN'S TALE OF RESILIENCE

*Mission Ready Season 2,*  
presented by ARC Resources,  
dives deep into the skill set of  
the STARS crew and the value  
of amazing response partners.

By Kate Langille



STARS Very Important Patient Draidyn Wollmann  
with his 1958 Pontiac Strato Chief in Laird, Sask.

PHOTOGRAPHS \ LYLE ASPINALL



STARS' *Mission Ready* podcast offers a front-row seat to the organization's essential life-saving work. In Season 2, presented by ARC Resources, listeners follow the incredible story of 16-year-old Draidyn Wollmann, who survived a devastating lawn-mowing incident.

Across eight half-hour episodes, listeners hear first-hand accounts from the Wollmann family, community members, STARS crew, and many more. This in-depth story sheds light on Wollmann's resilience and the incredible level of skill that STARS air medical crews possess.

### DRAIDYN WOLLMANN'S STORY

Disaster struck shortly after Draidyn Wollmann began his first summer job mowing lawns. A sudden turn threw him from the seat of the riding lawnmower. The machine ran him over, embedding a blade into his chest and severing his arm.

Trapped and conscious for nearly an hour, Wollmann was found by his manager, who called 911, triggering a STARS' dispatch. First responders and community allies were already working together when STARS flight nurse Bailey Sinclair and flight paramedic Glen Pilon arrived at the scene. The STARS crew immediately infused blood and intubated Wollmann while he was still trapped. Once he was freed, the crew continued care during the flight to the hospital.

Though he lost part of his arm, he survived. "If it wasn't for STARS, Draidyn wouldn't be alive," asserts Wollmann's mom, Christine.

## Thank You, ARC Resources

Telling stories with this level of depth takes time, care, and resources. Thank you to *Mission Ready* Season 2 partner ARC Resources for making it possible to bring listeners behind the scenes of STARS missions and help share the powerful stories that matter.

### Where to listen:

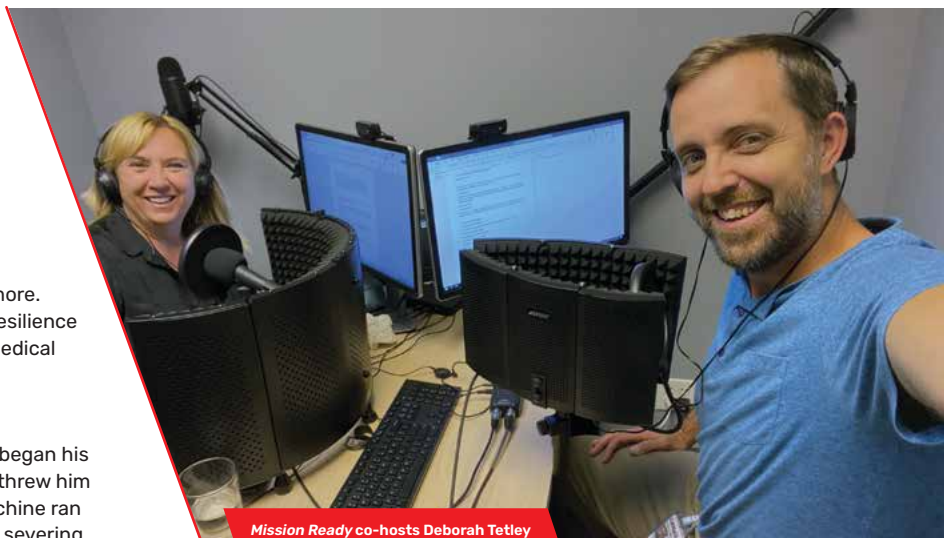
Listen to *Mission Ready* on your smartphone through apps such as Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or Amazon Music, or at [stars.ca/missionready](https://stars.ca/missionready), where you'll also find bonus videos and photos.



### BEHIND THE SCENES OF THE PODCAST

Wollmann's podcast season came to life organically. When Wollmann and his family came to the STARS base to meet his crew, he also met with Lyle Aspinall, STARS content lead and *Mission Ready* co-host, who was capturing photos of the visit.

As Aspinall and *Mission Ready* co-host Deborah Tetley spoke with Wollmann, his family, and the STARS crew involved, they were struck by his story and aspirations for the future.



*Mission Ready* co-hosts Deborah Tetley and Lyle Aspinall recording Season 2.

"Being a dad of kids in the same age range, Draidyn's story hits a little different for me," said Aspinall. "When you meet Draidyn and you see the way he carries on in life, with positivity, optimism, and the future in his eyes, it reminds you that a person's situation doesn't have to define them."

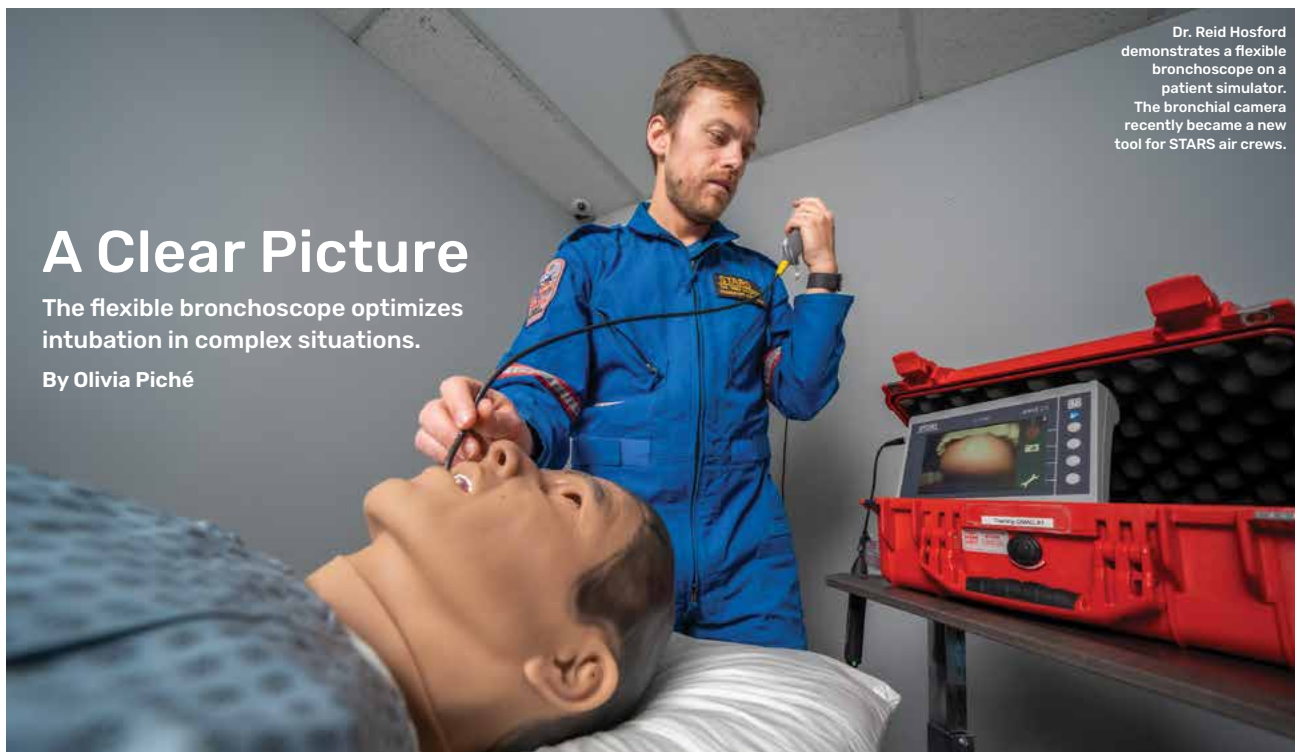
When presented with the opportunity to share his story on *Mission Ready*, Wollmann and his family jumped on board, and Season 2 was born.

### STARS IN ACTION

While Wollmann's story is extraordinary, it is one of 63,000 STARS missions flown in the last 40 years. STARS doesn't just save lives, it saves futures. When you support STARS, you help save the next patient in need and give someone a second chance at life.

"I hope the listeners feel like they're on a journey with Draidyn, his family, the crews, and with everybody who's been a part of this organization for 40 years," said Tetley. "Listeners might not have been physically on the ground, but they were there. All STARS donors had a role to play in saving Draidyn's life and giving him the best future possible."

In *Mission Ready* Season 2, listeners gain a deeper understanding of how STARS and first responders work together under pressure – showcasing not just a mission, but the extraordinary people behind it. ▀



Dr. Reid Hosford demonstrates a flexible bronchoscope on a patient simulator. The bronchial camera recently became a new tool for STARS air crews.

## A Clear Picture

The flexible bronchoscope optimizes intubation in complex situations.

By Olivia Piché

In life-saving situations, ensuring a patient has a secure airway is critical. But in certain cases, when there is trauma to the airway, excessive swelling, or even if the patient has atypical anatomy, intubation can be difficult. STARS has recently added a flexible bronchoscope to its air medical toolkit to help with complex cases, optimizing the efficiency and safety of intubation.

The device is a small camera on the end of a maneuverable scope that goes down the throat and allows STARS transport physicians to see past the vocal cords and into the trachea (windpipe), where they place an endotracheal (breathing) tube.

### AN UNOBSTRUCTED VIEW

In most cases, when a patient requires intubation, emergency responders use

a video laryngoscope, which allows visualization of the vocal cords. But for complications beyond the cords, STARS air medical crew typically need to use a stethoscope or an ultrasound to determine what is causing the problem. Now, with the flexible bronchoscope, transport physicians can clearly see what's happening further down the airway and more quickly find an effective solution.

"It gives us a much greater idea and picture of what's going on with the patient in their airway," said Dr. Reid Hosford, a transport physician and airway physician educator lead at STARS. "We're able to actually look down the airway, see where the endotracheal tube is, and see if there are secretions or other issues with the airway, and then actually fix it by changing the tube position, suctioning, or changing

the patient's position to improve oxygenation and ventilation."

Until recently, these devices were mostly used in hospitals and attached to large towers — too big for small spaces like helicopters. But now, with new disposable scopes that plug into the video laryngoscope screen, physicians can use the camera in air transit. STARS added the tool to its bases in Winnipeg and Calgary two years ago, and in the last year, it has rolled out the device to nearly all of its bases.

"This is a new technology, and we're continuing to increase the scope of its use to optimize patient care," said Hosford. "Airways, breathing, and ventilation are very, very important, and so being able to optimize that during transfers will have a big impact on patient outcomes."

# Lifted by Community, Powered to Fly

A look at the Taber Charity Auction's flight with STARS.

By Janice Rendflesh

For nearly three decades, the Taber Charity Auction has been at the heart of an incredible movement, uniting its community in support of STARS. The reasons for giving are personal, and the results are clear: lives saved, missions flown, and stronger, safer communities across southern Alberta.

In July 2025, STARS and the Taber Charity Auction committee gathered to celebrate this long-standing partnership with STARS' signature red helicopter making a special appearance. This visit wasn't for a mission, but it wasn't just for show. The visit marked the unveiling of the auction's logo on the helicopter, recognizing more than



The Taber Charity Auction committee stands proudly under its logo on the STARS helicopter.

\$1 million in cumulative giving through the partnership.

"At STARS, we recognize our greatest allies by placing their names on our helicopters," said Mike Lamacchia, chief operating officer, provincial operations for STARS, who attended the event. "For 29 years, the Taber Charity Auction has been a trusted ally and lifeline in critical care. This partnership allows us to connect our world-class crews with residents in southern Alberta when they need it most."

By surpassing the million-dollar milestone, the Taber Charity Auction logo now holds a place of distinction on the tail fin of two STARS helicopters – an exclusive place reserved for key community partners. The STARS team is proud to fly with this emblem on board;

it's a visible reminder of the impact a dedicated community can have.

Each April, the Taber community comes together for the annual auction. The first event in 1996 raised \$500, which was donated to STARS. Since then, the volunteers behind the event have grown the auction in size and scope. Today, it features a wide range of items donated by businesses and individuals, with proceeds supporting STARS and other critical care services.

"Our roots run deep with STARS, and we're proud to support their mission through the Taber Charity Auction," said Mitch Holst, auction co-chair. "Knowing that STARS is there for us not only brings comfort in difficult situations but also helps make Taber a safer and stronger community."

In 2024, STARS carried out 293 missions across southern Alberta, 15 of which were to Taber.



STARS flight nurse Michelle Sexsmith talks with Taber community members.





Left to right: David Pankratz, MLA for Waverley, and Hon. Uzoma Asagwara chat with Cindy Seidl, chief clinical officer for STARS, at the Winnipeg STARS base after the announcement.

## STARS Manitoba Flies into a Second Decade of Service

The Manitoba Government announces a 10-year renewal contract with STARS. **By Fabian Mayer**

It's official: STARS will continue to serve Manitobans until at least 2034. The Government of Manitoba renewed its contract with STARS last fall as "one way we are investing in rural healthcare and strengthening services for Manitobans," said Hon. Uzoma Asagwara, minister of health, seniors, and long-term care, at the public announcement on July 10, 2025.

STARS first came to Manitoba on a temporary basis as part of flood-response efforts in 2009. That spring, water levels in the Red River and many of its tributaries swelled to historic levels. Two years later, STARS was called in

again to help with emergency responses during yet more flooding in the province.

The events highlighted a need for a more permanent solution, and in 2012, the government contracted STARS to establish a permanent base in the province. During that initial 10-year span, STARS flew nearly 7,000 helicopter missions in Manitoba.

### A CRITICAL LINK

Grant Therrien, provincial director of Manitoba operations for STARS, stressed how critical the service is for a province that stretches across 650,000 square kilometres of remote and rugged terrain.

The province's only major trauma centre is centrally located at Winnipeg's Health Sciences Centre hospital, with STARS forming a crucial link between rural and remote Manitobans and the life-saving care administered there.

"We consider ourselves as one link in the chain of survival – it's from the time someone calls 911 to the first responders, to the helicopter," said Therrien. "We work hand-in-hand with paramedics, fire departments, hospital teams, and all with one goal: to save lives."

STARS works closely with Shared Health, Manitoba's provincial health agency, as well as numerous

other organizations to ensure life-saving services are available across the province.

"The importance of the service is highlighted in the amount of lives that are saved," said Therrien. "Having this technology and these highly trained providers – pilots, medical crew, engineers, and helicopters – means you put it all together and you're saving lives."

While the contract in Manitoba is for one 24-hour, critical-care helicopter, Therrien believes the added flexibility of having access to a fleet of 10 STARS aircraft across all three prairie provinces is another strength of the organization.

"Our fleet that serves Western Canada is standardized with the same aircraft, allowing us to adapt to dynamic needs across regions," said Therrien. "This ensures we can deploy a spare aircraft so we can always provide seamless service."



**EVERY MONTH,  
YOU CAN HELP  
STARS GO AS FAR  
AS IT NEEDS TO.**

**BECOME A MONTHLY DONOR TODAY!**



**Help save lives like Theo's.**

Theo was snowmobiling with his siblings when he hit a patch of ice and crashed (see story on page 3). With life-threatening injuries, he desperately needed critical care. Thanks to generous allies like you, STARS was able to reach him in time.

Join STARS FOR LIFE and become a monthly donor today to stand with STARS 24/7, 365 days a year. Your generosity will ensure patients like Theo always have access to the critical care they need – no matter where or when.



**\$10/month**

provides an airway-management tool.



**\$25/month**

provides a Blood on Board cooler system.



**\$50/month**

provides mission-critical equipment like an electronic flight bag.

**Become a monthly donor  
today at [stars.ca/monthly](https://stars.ca/monthly)  
or scan the QR code.**



## **Canadian Natural: Celebrating 35 years of dedicated partnership**



**Canadian Natural**

Since 1990, Canadian Natural has been a steadfast partner to STARS, helping deliver life-saving care across Western Canada. Its unwavering support and impact on the lives of patients, families, and communities is profound and lasting. United by a shared commitment to health, safety, and wellness, this partnership has ensured that patients will have access to the care they need most for generations to come. STARS is deeply grateful for Canadian Natural's dedication and proud to call them a key ally in the mission to provide critical care, anywhere.

STARS Very Important Patient Theo Konidas (centre) is surrounded by his dad Lee, mom Korin, sister Lizzie, and brother Yianni in Grandview, Alta.



**Your donation makes a difference.**  
It allows us to be there for the next patient in need.  
**Please donate today.**

PHOTOGRAPH \ LYLE ASPINALL

# HORIZONS

PRESENTED BY



**STARS Horizons \ Fall 2025**

**Return undeliverable items to:**  
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Calgary, Alberta T2E 8M7

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