



HORIZONS

We provide critical care, **anywhere.**



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Major injuries, bad weather put STARS crew to the test.

STARS Rescue events raise more than \$1.3 million for critical care.

Inside Field of STARS: Harvesting hope and saving lives together.



STARS Very Important Patient Sean Rickards stands with his family and STARS crew members. (Back row, L-R) Flight nurse Jenn Fosty, pilot Darryl Dash, pilot David Harding, and flight paramedic Troy Pauls. (Front row, L-R) Ryley, Sean, Connor, Raegan, and Mindy Rickards.

Major injuries, bad weather put STARS crew to the test

Pinned between two monster machines, teamwork and skill saved his life

An autumn storm approached as Sean Rickards and his workmate hurried to backfill a countryside dugout with a backhoe and a semi-truck.

Then, a miscue wedged him between the two massive machines.

"I had no time to move," said Sean, a general contractor, husband, and father of three. "I was broken within a millimetre of my life."

Emergency responders leapt into action and STARS was notified. Local crews freed Sean and whisked him to a nearby emergency room.

"I was told by the doctors that his right side was completely crushed," said Mindy Rickards, Sean's wife.

Both lungs had collapsed, and he needed trauma care in the city, almost four hours away by road.

Meanwhile, STARS pilots Darryl Dash and David Harding saw a safe window in unsettled weather that allowed them to accept the mission — about 280 km through the air, against a headwind.

"Compared to a lot of missions, this one was much more challenging," said Dash. "It was going to be tough both on the aviation side and the medical side."

Under STARS' standard two-pilot crew, he was the safety pilot, focusing on



STARS Very Important Patient Sean Rickards stands with the backhoe and semi-truck that were involved in his injury.



Rickards hugs pilot David Harding at the Winnipeg STARS base.

“I had no time to move,” said Sean, a general contractor, husband, and father of three. “I was broken within a millimetre of my life.”

— Sean Rickards, VERY IMPORTANT PATIENT

logistics, while Harding’s primary focus was on flying the aircraft.

“Honestly, the thought of turning around crossed my mind every minute for about 24 minutes as we transited the area,” said Harding. “But the thought of the clear air that was forecast and occurring to the west kept us going.”

After almost two hours, including a fuel stop, they finally arrived.

Sean went into cardiac arrest as the helicopter descended, but the local medical team was able to resuscitate him.

“When we initially walked in, I didn’t think we were going to take Sean out of the door that day because his injuries were so severe,” said flight nurse Jennifer Fosty. “He had two collapsed lungs; it was affecting his heart, which caused him likely to arrest in the first place. When we walked in, we were concerned that was going to happen again.”

However, teamwork throughout that small emergency room stabilized Sean well enough to transfer him into the helicopter for the 70-minute tailwind flight.

“I remember that helicopter lifting off and thinking, ‘That is the most precious cargo they will ever have,’” said Mindy.

“The trip back was busy,” said Fosty, noting that all six units of blood they had with them were used. “My hands were constantly moving. We were constantly trying to manage both his blood pressure and his oxygen levels with our ventilator, along with blood and many other medications to help keep his blood pressure up.”

Poor weather was still a threat, too, as they had just enough room to safely fly below icy conditions above. A ground ambulance was readied in case they had to land early.

“When the pilots called to the back and said we may need to land, my heart sank,” said Fosty.

Her partner agreed.

“I impolitely said that this patient would not survive if we had to stop,” said flight paramedic Troy Pauls.

But weather cooperated, and the STARS helicopter soon delivered Sean to the skilled specialists waiting at the trauma centre.

“There aren’t really words in the English language that can portray how thankful and how appreciative I am,” said Mindy.

Sean would go on to receive two titanium ribs and a chest plate, and five vertebrae were fused together.

Three weeks on, he surprised everyone by taking his first steps. He would leave the hospital a few days after that.

Several months later, Sean and his family met the entire STARS crew on his mission. Tearful hugs and smiles rippled through the hangar before the Rickards family stood in front of the crew as Sean spoke from the heart.

“It means so much,” he told them. “You guys have given my family back. You don’t realize how fragile life is until you have a scare like this. You brought me back from everything being gone.”



Watch Sean’s full story here.



Judges watch a scenario unfold in the All STARS Sim Comp.



See our crews in action at the All STARS Sim Comp.



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Simulation showdown: Crews shine in staged challenge

Inside our All STARS Simulation Competition

At STARS, we strive for excellence. Our ongoing crew training and education is paramount to constantly improving and serving our communities and patients to the best of our ability.

Our annual All STARS Simulation Competition (Sim Comp) allows our medical crews to display their abilities, skills and knowledge in a simulated scenario. Started in 2002, the Sim Comp brings together air medical crews from across all three provinces.

This year's competition was held near Wapiti Bridge in Grande Prairie, Alta. Five teams of two tackled a high-stress scenario with the help of our local first responder allies.



Left: STARS flight nurse Kevin Easton (R) and flight paramedic Chris Fay were the winning team and would go on to represent STARS internationally.

“Our teams are so effective at what they do that sometimes they do them so quickly it’s difficult for any single judge to catch.”

— Dr. Ping-Wei Cheng, STARS TRANSPORT PHYSICIAN

The event was not only a chance for teams to display skill, but also a celebration of teamwork, innovation, and dedication. The pairs engaged in a realistic and challenging scenario designed to push their limits, highlighting the critical roles of preparation, communication, and collaboration in saving lives. It underscored our commitment to excellence in critical care.

The scenario

The scenario was based on a real STARS mission. It included five individuals who crashed a boat into a riverbank and became stuck on a riverbank. All five injured patients were cared for by a STARS air medical crew.

For the competition, there were four actors and one high-fidelity human patient simulator (HPS), a sophisticated life-like mannequin that can be programmed to mimic a real-life human emergency. Each ‘patient’ had varying degrees of medical needs, with the HPS being the most critically injured.

The process

Each team was assigned a specific starting time. They were led to a tent near the incident where they were

briefed on the scenario, the equipment they could use on-site, and what they could and couldn’t do. None of the teams had any prior knowledge of the incident. Once briefed, they were sent out to the ‘patients’ who were stranded on the riverbank. Each team had different approaches in their responses, but all prioritized the patients’ health and livelihood.

Sim Comp organizers always implement at least one particularly heightened challenge, whether it’s a logistical issue or taking away one of the senses. The challenge pushes teams even further to ensure they can perform under pressure. This year, team members were challenged by physical distance created between the two of them, forcing them to lean on their communication and teamwork skills.

The judges were there to assess each team’s ability to navigate the response and faced a tough decision when it came to selecting a winning team after witnessing a day filled with incredible performances.

Transport physician and Grande Prairie base medical director Dr. Ping-Wei Chen was one of the judges and explained it takes a team effort to judge at an event like this, to ensure all angles are monitored.

“Our teams are so effective at what they do that sometimes they do them so quickly it’s difficult for any single judge to catch,” he said. “That’s why we actually have three judges: one judge for each member of the air medical crew and a third judge to maintain situational awareness.”

The winners

The 2024 winners were Kevin Easton and Chris Fay from the STARS Regina Base. Though it was a close competition, the judges were most impressed by their strong communication skills. With multiple distractions occurring and the physical distance that divided them, their ability to effectively come together and regroup as a team gave them a slight edge over the others.

The win qualified Easton and Fay to compete against international teams in the Sim Cup Challenge, part of the annual Air Medical Transport Conference in November, located in Salt Lake City, Utah. Keep an eye on our social media platforms to see their results.

“Our partnership with the Alberta government and Alberta Health Services is critical to our long-term success.”

— Katherine Emberly, STARS PRESIDENT AND CEO



Alberta Premier Danielle Smith is secured into the cockpit of a STARS helicopter by Jason Arthur, director, flight operations, during her visit in June 2024.

10-year funding agreement signals long-term stability for STARS

As STARS reaches nearly 40 years of service, Albertans can be confident STARS will be there well into the future, thanks to a new contract with Alberta Health Services.

The 10-year contract was announced on June 4, 2024, and will fund about 40 per cent of the annual operating cost for STARS' bases in Calgary, Edmonton, and Grande Prairie over the life of the agreement.

“Our partnership with the Alberta government and Alberta Health Services has been critical to our long-term success, and we would not be able to do the work we do today without their support,” said Katherine Emberly, president and CEO of STARS. “This long-term funding is a lifeline to our work and to our patients, and we are exceptionally grateful to be able to continue serving the Alberta community for many years to come.”

Alberta Premier Danielle Smith, MLA Martin Long (parliamentary secretary for rural health), and representatives from Alberta Health Services visited the STARS base in Calgary to announce the new contract. During their visit,

Premier Smith highlighted the imperative role that STARS plays in the province's emergency-response framework.

“Our government believes that every Albertan deserves access to the very best quality health care, no matter where they are in our province,” said Premier Smith. “This collaboration with STARS will help us to deliver exactly that by extending our reach to the most remote corners of Alberta and beyond, so that Albertans can always rely on access to the best emergency services.”

The Government of Alberta highlighted their continued and growing support for STARS as a trusted partner in Alberta's health-care system.

“It's about building a health-care system that prioritizes prevention, early intervention, and patient-focused care,” said MLA Long. “As

the government works to refocus the health-care system and establish a dedicated acute-care organization, I'm thrilled to support initiatives that will profoundly and positively affect emergency medical services in all communities for the better.”

The visit also featured a tour of the Calgary base, where Emberly and Premier Smith spoke with a dedicated team of air medical crew, pilots, and STARS Emergency Link Centre staff. Joining them were STARS founder Dr. Greg Powell, his wife Linda Powell, and STARS board members and employees.

As the province continues to grow and its health-care system evolves, the Alberta government's renewed partnership is a testament to the trust Albertans place in STARS and ensures that every Albertan has access to critical care when and where they need it most.



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STARS has access to this innovative technology and equipment thanks to support from Kinsmen Club of Winnipeg, the Berkhold Family Foundation, the Cardinal Foundation, and other generous donors. This incredible dedication from our allies fuels our ability to provide world-class critical care when patients need it most.

STARS flight paramedic Scott McTaggart demonstrates an automated CPR device now being used by several of our clinical teams.



Automated CPR device improves focus on patient

STARS has introduced automated CPR machines to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of resuscitation efforts during emergency flights.

The Lund University Cardiopulmonary Assist System (LUCAS) operates by assessing the patient's chest wall flexibility and then delivering compressions at the precise depth and rate the patient requires.

The decision to introduce this machine was driven by both technological advancements and firsthand experiences.

"We know that CPR is inconsistent, so we want to provide consistency for effective CPR," explained Scott McTaggart, a flight paramedic with more than two decades of experience at STARS. "This is all based on what's best for the patient while we're busy in the back of the aircraft."

The need for this technology was solidified during a recent mission where an automated CPR machine helped save a patient's life by delivering consistent chest

compressions, allowing the crew to focus on other critical tasks.

"Without that device, the patient would not have survived," said McTaggart.

STARS flight nurse Bruce Parsons played an important role in advancing the project and acquiring the new equipment, which was made possible by donors.

Our Grande Prairie base was the first to trial the automated CPR machine, with the Calgary base later purchasing one – the LUCAS 3 model by Stryker, a leading medical technology company.

The machine arrived in March 2024, and the crew completed online training and an in-person session with a Stryker representative. By April, our air medical crews were fully trained, and the machine was put into service later that month.

The impact was immediate. The automated CPR machine delivers consistent compressions, allowing the crew to focus on other important aspects of patient care like managing the airway and administering medications.

Feedback from the STARS crew has been very positive, as the machine allows them to concentrate on other areas of resuscitation.

"The future of this machine at STARS, I hope, will be organization-wide," McTaggart said.

Winnipeg is set to be the next STARS base to implement this technology, with two machines slated for delivery.

With continued support from donors, STARS can stay on the leading edge of medical technology, enabling us to provide the highest level of care to patients when they need it most.



Rescue in the Rockies

STARS Rescue events raise more than \$1.3 million for critical care

This past September, 14 business and community leaders donned flight suits to be airlifted by STARS to remote locations with the goal of raising \$50,000 each to earn their flights back to civilization. Incredibly, they jointly raised more than \$1.3 million.

This was all part of three distinct fundraisers: Rescue on the Prairie (Saskatchewan), Rescue on the River (Manitoba), and Rescue in the Rockies (Alberta). These exciting one-day events put community leaders to the test to see if they had what it took to navigate the complexities of a STARS mission while also networking to

raise critical funds to directly support operations in all three provinces.

“Our Rescue events are incredibly special because they are so much more than just fundraisers,” said Dr. John Froh, chief medical officer, STARS. “These events show our community allies exactly what it takes to be successful on any STARS mission, like staying calm under pressure, teamwork, and being able to think quickly and take on new challenges.”

Each Rescue included readiness challenges that saw participants race to suit up and buckle into a helicopter, aviation challenges that showed

them how to prepare like a pilot, and simulated medical challenges that demonstrated some of the life-saving skills that STARS air medical crews use every day.

“It was absolutely eye-opening to see just a small part of how the STARS team does its work,” said Rescue on the River participant Peggy Talbot of K&P Talbot Community Fund. “Their competence is so reassuring, especially thinking of family members and friends who could need STARS one day. I’m grateful to have the opportunity to raise greater awareness for STARS and contribute to such a dynamic cause.”



Rescue on the River

Rescue on the Prairie

Each Rescue event featured a fundraising challenge that tasked participants with raising as much money as possible in one hour. They called friends, family, colleagues, neighbours, and anyone else they could think of to.

Their \$1.3 million fundraising total reflected the community support that has bolstered STARS from the very beginning.

“Our founder, Dr. Greg Powell, often shares stories of the early days when we started in 1985, and he would go to the mailbox and hope there were enough donations to cover helicopter fuel that week,” said Katherine Emberly, STARS president and CEO. “To see how far we’ve come as an organization in nearly 40 years, to have these amazing community leaders rally behind our mission and help raise more than \$1 million in support of critical care, anywhere – it’s absolutely remarkable.

“We never want our teams to worry if they can go on that next mission or if we can purchase that life-saving piece of medical or safety equipment. It’s through the generosity of our community allies and our government partners that we can ensure we are always ready for the next call.”

STARS Rescue events will return in 2025.

“Our Rescue events are incredibly special because they are so much more than just fundraisers.”

– **Dr. John Froh**, STARS CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER



Rescue on the Prairie

Ashley Turner, realtor with Century 21 Fusion

Bryan Somerville, president of Somerville Farms Ltd.

Kendra Wack, founder and executive director of Degree Three

Regan McGrath, vice president of sales for Western Sales

Shayne Dueck, business advisor for MNP

Rescue on the River

Leta LaRush, vice president, business management, BASF Canada

Peggy Talbot, K&P Talbot Community Fund

Jesse Hamonic, vice president and country head, Canada, Nutrien Ag Solutions

Martin White, general sales manager, Enns Brothers

Rescue in the Rockies

Steve Glanville, CEO, STEP Energy Services

Andy Trewick, president & CEO, Graham

Jamie Saunders, senior vice president, operations, CDN Controls

Joel Armstrong, senior vice president, production & operations, Whitecap Resources

Carolyn Martin, CEO, Sponsor Energy





"STARS is such a crucial link in medical emergencies across Western Canada. That's why I began early on to support it financially and would one day decide to make a major contribution to its wonderfully worthy cause. Sometimes when I hear the thrum of its helicopters flying over our ranch en route to Calgary, I feel a quiet joy about being allowed to play a small part in the success of STARS."

STAN GRAD, 1944-2023

Leaving a Legacy: Remembering Stan Grad

August 5, 1944 – July 29, 2023

Above left: Stan Grad flies in a STARS helicopter in 2013, over the site of a vehicle accident that resulted in the death of his daughter Kristine in 1990. After the accident, Grad devoted much time and effort to STARS.

It was a cool morning in Feb. 1990 when Stan Grad's youngest daughter, Kristine, was driving to school near their rural home and collided with a fertilizer truck.

STARS transported Kristine to the closest trauma centre. While both the air medical crew and the hospital staff worked diligently to help her, Kristine sadly succumbed to her injuries shortly after arrival.

In the wake of immense tragedy, Stan recognized the importance of services like STARS and made the decision to dedicate life to ensuring every person in Alberta – no matter where they live, work, or play – has access to critical care and the best chance of survival in the event of an emergency.

Stan's commitment really kicked off when he donated a fully restored vintage 1929 Ford Model A roadster to raffle off for STARS. Rallying a team of volunteers, he sold tickets and raised awareness of STARS in more than 50 rural communities, raising more than \$120,000.

"Stan was an undeniable force," said Dr. Greg Powell, STARS founder and ongoing ambassador. "From the outset of his involvement with STARS, after the tragic loss of his daughter, he dedicated his heart and soul into building and solidifying the STARS organization to ensure we could

continue helping people well into the future. He quickly became a quiet champion and leader, mentor, partner, and community collaborator, and his friendship was so valued."

For more than 30 years, the oilman and rancher would go on to commit time, energy, and resources to growing STARS into the organization people know it as today.

Stan and his wife Jane believed deeply in the power of community. His involvement with STARS was always led with purpose and passion to help STARS gain financial stability.

In 1997, he co-chaired Seconds Count, a first-of-its-kind capital campaign that had a goal of raising \$7.5 million to allow STARS to purchase its own helicopters for the first time and to implement a research and education arm for the organization. He was fundamental in building awareness about the importance of STARS with the Alberta government. In the end, the campaign raised more than \$8.1 million.

Through the years, Stan engrained himself in the fabric of the organization, playing a key role in the development

of the STARS Foundation, launching fundraising programs still used to this day, and sitting on the board of directors for more than two decades.

Though he passed away in July 2023, the ripple effect of Stan's impact continues to live on in every STARS mission.

To recognize and commemorate his immense legacy, the STARS team was proud to nominate him for the Lifetime Achievement in Philanthropy award through the Association of Fundraising Professionals, Calgary & Area.

Katherine Emberly, STARS president and CEO, and Stan's family were in attendance to honour his legacy at the National Philanthropy Day Awards luncheon in Calgary this past November.

"Stan truly brought people from all walks of life together," Emberly said. "From the corporate world to the rural community, he rallied support for STARS with everyone he met. His profound impact will continue to be felt for decades to come."



At left: A decal celebrating the donors of the Ron McLennan Memorial Education Award highlights the fenestron of a STARS helicopter.

Ron McLennan, supplied photo.



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On behalf of all STARS employees, thank you to the dedicated award donors – Margery McLennan, McGregor-Sharp Filtering Equipment, Greg and Linda Powell, and Chemco – for investing in STARS' future by supporting this educational opportunity for two decades.

Meaningful award hits 20 years celebrating employee leadership

Ron and Margery McLennan set out for a bike ride from their lake house on a summer afternoon. Their children were driving up for a family dinner to celebrate their anniversary. The day promised joy and togetherness.

Ron, known for his adventurous and carefree spirit, spotted a rickety ramp and couldn't resist the temptation to jump. With a rush of adrenaline, he took off, but the landing went horribly wrong.

In a flash, what should have been a fun leisurely bike ride turned into a crisis. STARS was called to the scene, and he was immediately transported to the nearest major hospital. But, despite their efforts, Ron tragically passed away. The day that started with laughter ended in heartbreak, leaving his family to mourn the loss of a beloved husband and father.

In 2004, the Ron McLennan Memorial Education Award was established by Brian Halina, President of Chemco, and close friend of Ron's. It is funded annually by Margery McLennan, her son Greg's company McGregor-Sharp Filtering Equipment and Dr. Greg and

Linda Powell, STARS founders. This year marks the 20th anniversary of the award.

At STARS, the award is presented annually to six team members who have displayed personal leadership in their teams, their bases, and the communities they serve. The honour of winning the Ron McLennan Award acknowledges the recipient's hard work and dedication and allows the recipient to allocate funds towards education and growth. Recipients are nominated by their peers, based on criteria such as ability to inspire others, commitment to professional development, and the positive influence they've had on patient care and their colleagues.

"It's an honour to be selected for this award," said past recipient Lyle Aspinall, a member of the STARS

communications team. "The impact of the recognition and the value of the leadership training that resulted were enormous for me."

This year, STARS invited the dedicated group who established and continue to fund the award to attend the award ceremony. We were proud to recognize these generous allies by unveiling the Ron McLennan Memorial Education Award decal on all STARS helicopters to commemorate this milestone anniversary.

"It was super meaningful to know that there was some good result that came of all of this," said Margery. "It has made me so proud that we can give back in some way. STARS does wonderful things and I'm happy to be a part of that."

Helicopter upgrades increase capacity, reduce vibration

A STARS H145 helicopter undergoes its major D2-to-D3 conversion, the type shown at right.



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STARS' H145 blade conversion is funded by generous donors like Vision Credit Union. This initiative has optimized our aircraft's capabilities, ensuring exceptional maneuverability and safety. Thank you – your contribution enhances our ability to respond.

STARS' red helicopter has long been a symbol of hope and rescue in the vast expanse of Canada's rugged landscapes. For decades, our specialized air medical crew and pilots have flown to deliver critical care in some of the most remote and challenging locations.

Now, STARS has elevated its mission to a new level with the introduction of the Airbus H145 D3 helicopter. This conversion from the D2 marked a leap forward in technology and capability, and promised faster, safer, and more efficient missions. The cutting-edge advancements of a D3, the journey of its implementation, and its transformative impact mark a new beginning in airborne medical rescue.

The conversion to the H145 D3 introduced many major updates that enhanced the helicopter's performance and reliability. The most significant change is the addition of a fifth blade, along with changes to the structure of the blades, an increase in weight allowance, removal of anti-vibration hardware, and a new rotor head.

The addition of the fifth blade significantly increased the useful load of the helicopter, simplified maintenance operations, and

improved ride comfort for both passengers and crew. It also ensured less vibration throughout the aircraft, allowing several anti-vibration devices to be removed, and increasing weight allowance by around 100 kg.

"When you add a fifth blade, the whole frequency of the aircraft changes," said DJ Lafrance, STARS fleet support manager. "So, vibration absorbers and dampers are no longer required at all."

The new assembly at the top of the helicopter involves an advanced Bearingless Motor Rotor (BMR), which is a simpler design that reduces maintenance costs. It makes the D3 rotor far less susceptible to gusts in comparison to the D2, further improving our ability to complete missions in harsh weather and climates.

"We are impressed by the increased performance and capabilities that the five-bladed version of the H145 brings

to our operations," said David Harding, STARS chief aviation officer. "It is uniquely matched to our demanding mission requirements and provides a remarkably smoother ride, resulting in an even better clinical environment for our patients."

While we embraced this generation of our fleet, the Airbus H145 D3 stands as a testament to STARS' dedication to innovation and excellence in emergency medical services.

With its enhanced capabilities, increased efficiency, and unparalleled stability, the D3 is more than just an upgrade – it's a powerful tool that enables STARS to continue saving lives with greater precision and effectiveness. In a place where every second counts, the D3 ensures that STARS remains at the forefront of airborne medical rescue, ready to respond whenever and wherever it's needed most.

Inside Field of STARS: Harvesting hope and saving lives together

One of STARS' signature events, bringing together the agricultural industry in Saskatchewan to raise critical funds for STARS in the province, raised a record-breaking \$550,000 this year.

The Field of STARS event was back for its seventh year this summer. The funds raised directly support our operations in Saskatchewan, ensuring we can continue to deliver critical care and rapid response to those who need it most.

Presented by Nutrien, the event featured a barbecue rib dinner, live and silent auctions, engaging games, and an amazing performance by The Washboard Union.

The first Field of STARS was in 2018 and was held on the grounds of Ag in Motion. The idea was to bring the

community together to celebrate, network, and support STARS. Since then, STARS and Ag in Motion have been partners, along with dozens of other companies, supporting Field of STARS through a campaign and an evening event. Members of the agriculture community and beyond attend to support the vital services that STARS provides.

"We are grateful to have the opportunity to bring the agriculture community together to network and share their support for STARS," said Tammy Beauregard, director of development

in Saskatchewan and Manitoba. "The support for this event never ceases to amaze me and we always make sure there is great entertainment and fun to be had."

Since the event's inception, it has raised more than \$3 million for STARS in Saskatchewan. This is a testament to the generosity of our community. Looking ahead, we're excited to continue this journey, knowing that with each passing year we're making a life-saving difference.



STARS president and CEO Katherine Emberly is flanked by Alanna Koch, committee chair, and Shaun Haney, emcee, from RealAgriculture, during Field of STARS 2024.

Our heartfelt thanks go out to the Field of STARS committee, led by committee chair Alanna Koch, who helped make this event a huge success. Thank you to all the supporters and attendees of this year's event. Each of you plays a crucial role in raising the vital funds that enable us to continue providing the best care and reaching our patients, wherever they are.



Patient journey comes full circle, from accident to nursing

STARS Very Important Patient – and a nurse by trade – Kaitlyn Julas joins STARS flight nurse Krista Hartmann on a ride-along shift in Edmonton.

On a sunny winter morning, Kaitlyn Julas' life was irrevocably changed. While driving to work, she was involved in a severe car accident that left her with extensive trauma – her face and skull were crushed. As the minutes ticked by, her fate seemed uncertain.

"I woke up to the searing sting of ice and snow piercing my bare skin," Julas recalled. "A metallic taste. Darkness. I couldn't see what was happening.

Panic overcame me as I attempted to stand up. I remember slurring my words and I could hear myself saying out loud, 'Help me, somebody please help me!'"

A ground ambulance shortly arrived and transported her to a rural hospital, where a STARS crew picked her up and provided critical care in the air while en route to a trauma centre in the city.

Julas' journey from that fateful day to the present has been nothing short of remarkable. Embracing the second chance she was given, she dedicated herself to recovery. Through rigorous physiotherapy and a determined spirit, she pursued a career in health care, driven by a deep-seated desire to give back and make a difference. She earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Nursing and worked diligently across several hospitals to gain experience and support herself.



Kaitlyn Julas is flanked by STARS flight nurse Krista Hartmann and STARS flight paramedic Michael Christian during her ride-along shift.

“I think the reason I’m so attracted to this type of position is the ability to give back to the community and to make sure that everybody has access to high-level critical care.”

– **Kaitlyn Julas**, STARS VERY IMPORTANT PATIENT

Then, Julas was offered a second ride in a STARS helicopter, this time as a ride-along observer to support her career in trauma nursing. Donning a flight suit like the ones worn by the very nurses who saved her life, she joined our Edmonton team for a daylong shift and was struck by the poignancy.

“I put the suit on, and I was thinking, ‘Wow, this is a full-circle moment,’” said Julas. “It’s pretty incredible.”

During the ride-along, the team responded to a motor vehicle collision (MVC), a scenario all too familiar to Julas, and the patient was transported to the hospital where she works.

“The patient was in an MVC and had sustained a significant head injury, as ironic as that is,” she said. “I got to be on the other side of what I had experienced as a patient.”

Seeing a mission from inside the helicopter, Julas watched first hand the unique challenges of providing critical care in the air. The small space of the helicopter interior demanded another level of swift, precise action and constant adaptability. She was fascinated by our crew members’ ability to manage critical care in such intense settings.

“It’s an incredibly intimate environment with your partner,” explained Julas. “The nurse and the medic are working together in conjunction. So, the paramedic manages the patient’s airway, generally, and the nurse manages the care and the medications. And you’re working within arm’s reach of all your life-saving interventions, which are all compressed into small areas for storage.”

As she witnessed the seamless integration of her two worlds, the full

circle of her journey became clear: the very service that once rescued her was now intertwined with her professional life. This moment, where her past and present converged, was a testament to the dedication and perseverance she had shown throughout her recovery and career.

“I think the reason I’m so attracted to this type of position is just the ability to give back to the community and to make sure that everybody has access to high-level critical care, despite where they may be geographically,” said Julas.

“If I could impact one person’s life as profoundly as mine has been impacted, I feel like I could say that that’s a life well lived.”



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

STARS Horizons | Fall 2024

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