

Keeping Oregon Safe in a Pandemic: Meet Two Women on the Port Fire Team

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During Women's History Month, **we're choosing to challenge a history of writing women's contributions out of history.** We're excited to highlight the contributions of our own Port women throughout the month.

Related: [Meet the Unstoppable Port Women Making History](#)

Today, we're highlighting a few women on the Portland Airport Fire & Rescue Team. The Fire Department manages several emergency programs at PDX, including aircraft rescue firefighting, and paramedic and water rescue (PDX is located right by the Columbia River, after all). And while we took a lot of steps to keep travelers and employees safe at the airport, the biggest applause should be reserved for this team — they've been our first medical responder at PDX throughout the pandemic.

Get to know a few of the women on our firefighting team who made it through a historic year ... together.

Can you describe your path to working in fire safety and medical response?

Lani Hill: I started my career as a wildland firefighter, it was a great way to save up funds during the short summer months and it helped keep me in shape for basketball at PSU. After graduation, I found employment at a law firm...but I missed firefighting, so I joined the Air National Guard and after basic training and the fire academy I became an aircraft firefighter and EMT. I worked as a firefighter/lieutenant for the Portland Airbase Fire & Rescue for nine years, four of those also serving as a firefighter for the 142nd fighter wing, Portland Air National Guard. I made my way across the runway to PDX a little over 13 years ago where I now hold the title of Deputy Fire Marshal for the Port of Portland.



Lani Hill (left) with other firefighters working at the Girls Build camp in 2019

Karyn Barr: I studied Sports Medicine in college, and after graduation came back to my hometown to start my new career. At the suggestion of a family friend, I became a volunteer firefighter and I quickly fell in love with the work. I immediately started studying, working out and testing to prepare to join the fire service industry. I also went after my EMT and then EMT-Intermediate certifications, ultimately getting my paramedic certification after being hired by the Port. Absolutely no regrets on my career choice!

You've been working on-site through this pandemic. What has this experience been like for you?

Karyn Barr: The thing about the fire service is that you are used to being “at work” when others are staying home. It’s just part of the job. I will say that this last year has taken that to an extreme, but this is what we do, whether it is a weather event, holiday...or a pandemic. Honestly, although our job has been anything but normal this last year, there was normalcy in still showing. Kudos to our crews for being a constant and ensuring we were ready to respond every day.

Lani Hill: I am thankful that I had the opportunity to work from home for the majority of this pandemic. I only go in when absolutely necessary, which lately has been a bit more frequent. I have been concerned for my teammates as they navigate the pandemic response. I can only imagine the stress and pressure this has put on them and their families.

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Firefighter Ashley Yukich helping at the Girls Build camp in 2019



Firefighter Ashley Yukich teaching compressions at the Oregon Tradeswomen Career Fair

What has been one of the biggest challenges you've overcome in your career?

Lani Hill: One of the most difficult things was when I was diagnosed with Rheumatoid Arthritis. I didn't know how that would affect my job performance and physical capabilities. I knew a transition might be necessary because of the physical toll of firefighting on one's body. Although it was a difficult decision at the time, I found myself in a role I love as deputy fire marshal for PAF&R.

Karyn Barr: One of the biggest challenges has been staying prepared for what will be thrown at you next. This job has changed a lot over my 21 years at the Port, which can sometimes leave you feeling underprepared. Whether it be terrorism, active shooters or global virus outbreaks, it all requires you to learn something new. However, those challenges are also part of what I like so much about my occupation.



It is no wonder that Lani and Karyn are passionate about serving on the Portland Airport Fire and Rescue team – it’s challenging work and an occupation that requires a high level of both emotional and physical endurance. When asked about what they love the most about being a part of Portland Airport Fire and Rescue their responses were alike in calling out their team.

As Karyn explained, “To work with a group of people that always has your back is great.” She continued, “Huge kudos to our crews for all their efforts this last year. It’s not over yet, but I know that we will handle whatever the future holds.”

And while there may be many unknowns in the future, these Port women – who shape the community and our history – are facing forward, tackling what comes together.