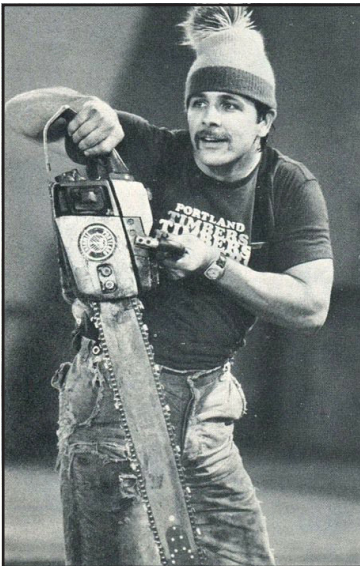


Spreading the Love with Timber Jim

BY LARRY McCLURE

“Spread the Love” is the mantra for Tualatin resident Jim Serrill who lives those words in everything he does. But it could have been another story for this professional tree trimmer whose life has been riddled with family tragedies and cancer. After realizing anger and negative attitudes could be turned to positive good, Jim now recommends being prepared and meeting personal challenges head on. In the process, he inspires others to do the same.

Known to Portland Timbers soccer fans as Timber Jim, who originally climbed a spar pole and chain-sawed a slab off a huge log after each goal, Jim has redirected his energy to giving a helping hand. Jim has legions of friends in the Timbers Army and in Tualatin who are willing to join him in community service. His life story prompted an invitation to make a TEDx PDX talk last month at Keller Auditorium. In Jim’s presentation he opened his chest and revealed what is in his heart. Displayed on stage was Portland’s first Major League Soccer National Championship Cup. Jim was also awarded a 2015 Championship Ring for his many years as the Director of Love and Celebration for the Portland Timbers. His TEDx PDX Talk can be heard on YouTube revealing a life filled with trials and triumphs alike.



Timber Jim was named Portland Timbers mascot in 1978 until health issues forced his retirement in 2008.

Jim’s trail of hard knocks began the only time his father failed to wear a lifejacket... it proved fatal. Later, Jim’s first marriage ended in divorce and a daughter that grew up far away on the east coast. Tree climbing accidents over the years resulted in serious injuries. Jim taught safety training and CPR for many years, but that wasn’t enough to save his youngest daughter Hannah who was reclined in her car seat and slipped through the safety belt that broke her neck in an instantly-fatal head-on crash. Jim has fought to control diabetes and has overcome two struggles with cancer. The sum of those battles was enough to require an early retirement from clearing power lines. Jim and his wife Diane raised three daughters and have called Tualatin home for 25 years. Jim and Diane’s granddaughter Keiana (daughter of Hannah) lives with her grandparents. “She is a ray of sunshine,” says Jim.

Jim spearheaded the very successful Hilltop Community Garden three years ago after looking for a way to focus his pent-up energy into something positive. Driving by an empty field on Tualatin United Methodist Church property on Martinazzi Ave almost daily, he stopped and asked, “Can we get a community garden started?” Volunteers stepped forward to help and raised the needed funds. The second growing season in 2015 netted over 3600 pounds of fresh produce donated to the Tualatin Schoolhouse Food Pantry. Additionally, 28 families grew vegetables for their own use. Just this month another 2500 square feet of vegetable production space was added when Brian Clopton Excavation donated six truckloads of soil and heavy equipment to fill where an unused building once stood. Grimm’s Fuel provided two truck loads of compost to amend the soil.

It was the combination of soccer and gardening that is leading Timber Jim to the African nation of Tanzania next month. The

Red Sweater Project, founded by Lake Oswego native Ashley Holmer, has created a school for indigenous Africans (Maasai, among other native tribes) in Tanzania, where Jim will be assisting in revitalizing depleted soil and teaching the children to grow their own food in a sustainable way. The school project began 10 years ago after Ashley and her twin sister, both local soccer stars and trained coaches, volunteered for a year as soccer coaches to boys and girls in a rural school. She was appalled by the lack of education for adolescent girls, who are typically offered up for marriage in exchange in livestock. Ashley is making education her life’s work and feels it is the key to unlocking opportunities for girls all over the world. Ashley started by engaging the local villagers and government leaders, who were impressed with a female who could play at such competitive levels. Thanks to donors worldwide ten years later, a growing campus is serving hundreds of tribal children who often walk several miles to school. Ashley remembered Timber Jim from her own soccer days in Portland and on trips back home to Lake Oswego. Holmer enlisted him to determine how community gardening might work there. The Timbers Army has since provided shoes, support and the Portland Timbers FC gave uniforms for students at the school. See: www.redsweaterproject.org.

Jim’s focus is on doing well for others as a way to heal himself. This has opened more doors of opportunity and community service. His love of history landed him a spot on the board of directors for Tualatin Historical Society where he also enjoys helping 4th graders with gardening on their Pioneer Days field trip to the Tualatin Heritage Center each spring. His passion for growing healthy foods was a natural fit at Winona Grange where he is in demand from other Oregon granges interested in promoting community gardening.



Hilltop Community Garden manager Jim shared a plot with granddaughter Keiana.

Drive by Hilltop Community Garden this summer and you may see Jim tending his own plot or talking to neighborhood kids about pollinators that guarantee a good harvest. If he’s not there, he may be kayaking on the Tualatin River (with lifejacket) or helping someone else who may be facing difficult times themselves. But at Timbers home game days he’ll be singing with the Timbers Army and proudly watching his protégé Timber Joey who slices the log for each goal now and is also on the Hilltop Community Garden team.



Larry and his wife Ellie have lived in Tualatin for 44 years where they raised 3 children and follow 7 grandchildren on Facebook.



Maasai Tribal students in Tanzania, wearing their new soccer uniforms from Timbers Army, will be learning about growing their own gardens when Jim visits the campus next month to recommend how to begin.