

## **Crew of Tidewater's Tugboat "Ryan Point" Saves Two Lives on the Columbia**

The downstream current was as expected, but the two to three foot swells and 30 mph wind gusts in the Columbia River channel (mile marker 288) was a tad unusual during that clear, mid-September evening. Long-time Tidewater captain, Josh Burrows, kept a watchful eye on the horizon and a steady hand on his steering instruments. The six o'clock (1800 military) watch change on the Ryan Point was less than a half hour away. Whiffs of the homemade dinner had quickened the pace of crewmembers preparing for their upcoming shift, and was greeting the on-duty crew ready for a welcome break.

On that Tuesday, September 11, nearly 1,000 feet off the Ryan Point's starboard bow, Captain Burrows noticed something curious. After closer look, Captain Burrows saw that it was a small overturned boat with two people clinging to the sides. Pilot Riley Wyatt was drinking his coffee in the galley and Deck Mechanics (DM) Ken Marvel and Billy Pike were grabbing a bite to eat when they noticed the Ryan Point had slowed down significantly. The crew was able to make out the boat rather quickly and sounded the man overboard alarm. Work vests were donned and the team headed out to the deck to assess the situation. Using VHF radios, the crew was able to communicate with Captain Burrows in the wheelhouse - allowing him to maneuver the stern of the tug within throwing distance for the life rings.

Neither of the individuals in the water were wearing life jackets, and were extremely weak from treading cold, rough waters for three hours. Laurie Merrell (47) of Umatilla struggled to hold onto the life ring and instead put herself through the ring for the crew to pull her towards the tug and the positioned man-overboard ladder. Thankfully, Merrell was able to get herself onto the first rung of the ladder where Marvel and Billy Pike were able to reach down on either side of her and pull her aboard. The same water rescue took place for her companion, Derek Ness (38), also of Umatilla. While Marvel and Wyatt lead first aid operations on the rescued, the other crewmembers pulled the small vessel out of the water, and Captain Burrows made an emergency call to the United States Coast Guard (USCG).

Vital signs were measured and assessed immediately. Dangerously low body temperatures, especially Merrell's, whose initial temperature would not register on the thermometer, shivering, weakness, and tiredness were all indication that both Merrell and Ness were suffering from hypothermia. Blankets, heaters, dry clothing (provided by Marvel and DM Harry Pike), and tea provided essential gradual warmth and hydration. It was decided by the USCG, Morrow County Sheriff's Office and Captain Burrows that, rather than risking a boat transfer in rough, open waters, the well-trained and well-equipped tug crew would treat Merrell and Ness on-board while enroute to the Tidewater dock in Boardman, Oregon.

Morrow County Marine Deputy, Mike Cahill, coordinated with Captain Burrows and Roy Drago, Jr. ("Junior"), Leadman Crane Operator of the Boardman Tidewater terminal, to have emergency services in place at the facility when the Ryan Point arrived. The response included the Morrow County Sheriff, Boardman Rural Fire Department, Morrow County Ambulance and Morrow County Marine Patrol. Throughout the next two hours, first aid continued to be administered. Merrell and Ness explained that a tugboat had gone by a half hour before but did not see their distress waves. They were so grateful to everyone on the tug for rescuing them. Once she regained her strength, Merrell managed to find a piece of paper and pen to jot a note in thanks - "I am so thankful. Any longer and we would have been frozen. You are all a blessing and are very nice, helpful and caring. Thank you for all you have done for us!"

In order to provide better access for emergency responders to board, the Ryan Point dropped off their full grain barge at the Pacific Ethanol dock and pulled directly into Tidewater's Boardman Terminal. Ness

was able to walk off the tug under his own power, but Merrell was brought off on a rolling stretcher. Both were treated on-site and released to family members.

Tidewater provided life jackets to the fire fighters who helped remove the skiff involved in the incident from the bow of the Ryan Point. The mother and brother of Ness were on-site with a trailer to transport the small craft.

"The entire crew worked very well together," expressed Captain Burrows. "They executed their man overboard and first aid training in an efficient and professional manner."

Morrow County Sheriff's Office Administrative Lieutenant and Public Information Officer, Melissa Ross, said that Merrell and Ness, "owe their lives to the Captain and crew of the Ryan Point. If not for them and their vigilance, the end of this story would have been very different."