

Local business owner considered hero by Morrisonville, Illinois Fire Protection District

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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MORRISONVILLE - After a 25-year-old **Taylorville** woman and her unborn child lost their lives in a two-vehicle crash in Morrisonville on Oct. 22, 2016, a local man

donated the town's fire department a tool, which could have saved their lives - a pair of hydraulic cutters colloquially known as "The Jaws of Life."

Deputy Carlinville Fire Chief John Schott said he was one of the first witnesses of that October crash. He recalled tending to a 27-year-old man from **Normal, Illinois**, who was traveling northbound on **Illinois 48** before his vehicle turned into the southbound lanes and hit a car being driven by a 28-year-old Taylorville man. **Jessica N. Tyson Ragan**, 25, of Taylorville was pronounced dead at Taylorville Memorial Hospital approximately 40 minutes following the crash, according to the State Journal-Register. Ragan was pregnant at the time of her death

Schott followed a "long line of cars," and applied first aid to the man from Normal. He said the woman in the other car was in "bad shape" when he saw her, and he watched as the **Morrisonville Fire Department** worked to cut her from the vehicle without the use of hydraulic tools.

"Basically, there wasn't much any of us could do besides try to provide basic patient care," Schott said. "We stayed with the patients until EMS arrived on the scene."

After the crash, Schott said he considered many members of his wife's family who called Morrisonville home. If anything were to happen to them, he said, he would like to know the emergency services were well-stocked enough to assist them.

"They didn't have any good extraction tools," Schott said. "We made some phone calls to see if we could get any extraction tools."

One of those phone calls went to Godfrey Firefighter and **Fastenal** salesperson, **Aaron Fry**. Fry said he recalled recently selling a set of hydraulic cutters to **Brian L Zirkelbach** of **A-Z Welding** in **Fosterburg**.

Zirkelbach said he used the cutters for a job he was doing, but after hearing about the deaths of Ragan and her unborn baby, said he had no issue donating them.

"They had a fatal accident up there," Zirkelbach said. "If they had those cutters, they could have saved a life of a woman and her unborn child."

Fry called Zirkelbach and asked if he still had the cutters, which were originally sourced from the **Godfrey Fire Protection District**. Zirkelbach said, besides being the life-saving tool, which earned its popular moniker, the Jaws of Life can also be used to straighten metal. He estimated the value of his set at around \$20,000, but was quick to add he did not pay that much for them.

"I got my use from them," Zirkelbach said. "When Aaron Fry asked if I would be interested in donating them, I said, 'sure, why not?'. "

Morrisonville Fire Chief Mike Parkin said Zirkelbach was "a hero" for his contribution. New pairs of hydraulic cutters can cost upwards of \$50,000, which is a steep price for a small Illinois town in Christian County, located just south of Taylorville.

Schott said firefighters from Morrisonville are currently training with the equipment, as a need for their use has not yet presented itself since the donation.

