Internationally Acclaimed Burn Survivor to Speak in Bethlehem

What does an Eisenhower Fellowship, Bogata Columbia, and an Allentown bio-med company have in common? Why, Natalia Ponce de Leon, of course!

Natalia Ponce de Leon became a national heroine in her native country of Columbia and an internationally acclaimed advocate for victims of intentional acid burns to women following the worse day of her life. Natalia, a successful business woman in Bogata, Columbia, was visiting her mother’s home when she responded to a knock on the front door. Upon opening the door, she was greeted by a male stalker who flung a cup of sulfuric acid at her face. “I was in shock”, Ponce de Leon later commented, “and then I realized that my face was melting off!”

Natalia was rushed to Simon Bolivar Hospital where she was treated for 2nd and 3rd degree burns to her face, neck, arms and upper body. “My biggest concern was losing my eye sight,” she reflected. Natalia underwent 32 facial reconstruction surgeries. Part of Natalia’s treatment included the wearing of a specially fitted thermoplastic face mask (Silon STS) to flatten the scars as they formed. It just so happens that that face mask was produced by Bio Med Sciences Company in Allentown, PA. Not only did that face mask aid in her physical healing and recovery of self-confidence, it would become the symbol of a media focused campaign she launched to change the laws for criminal punishment in Columbia.

As Natalia healed, her resolve to fight back grew. She would not retire from public sight and allow criminals to continue to get away with a slap on the wrist following a generous bribe while other women suffered the life altering results of these despicable assaults. Not so long as Columbia continued to lead the world in acid burn attacks on women!

So Natalia went public. She enlisted media news anchors, legislators, even the Prime Minister’s wife to wear her mask when they appeared in public. The response was phenomenal! Public support was unprecedented. Natalia wore her face mask, produced in Allentown, Pennsylvania, for the last time on the day that the Columbian Legislature decreed a mandatory 50-year imprisonment for persons committing assault using acid. At a press conference announcing this victory she said, “I wore the mask so other women would never have to.”

Natalia Ponce de Leon will be our feature speaker at the Valley Preferred Spirit of Courage Award Celebration on October 2, 2018, on the grounds of Lehigh Valley Health Network – Muhlenburg, Bethlehem, PA. Come and join us as we celebrate her victory and the courageous actions of other everyday heroes.

To see Natalia’s story visit: https://youtu.be/0OemhDkgBBo
DORATHY & ZIGGY
(First Year at Camp Susquehanna)

Tell us about Ziggy:
Ziggy is a 6 year old goldendoodle (he will turn 7 exactly one week after camp!), His favorite toys are his Chicken & his tennis ball. Ziggy is a very relaxed dog who loves being with people.

How long have you worked with Crisis Response Canines?
July will start our fourth year of Crisis Response

Tell about your most memorable experience(s) working with Crisis Response Canines.
Working with National is a great experience... The most memorable part is meeting new team members and their canines. Spending time with the team is always inspiring and we always leave with new friends, both human and canine.

What do you and Ziggy do for fun?
Ziggy & I love to go on hikes in the woods, and Ziggy loves to squish his feet in the mud right after it rains. We love to travel and to visit new places and make new friends.

Tell me about YOU!
I am the soap maker for Hyssop Tree, a soap company based in Kentucky that makes pure soap and donates one soap for every soap purchased. I love all things crafty and DIY... and I believe it’s much more fun when I’m making things with friends!

What would you like people to know about you?
I’m really excited about the opportunity to be at camp... I can’t wait to make new friends and create new memories together.
**REBECCA & SUMMER**  
*(Third Year at Camp Susquehanna)*

**Your dog’s name, age, breed, favorite toy, and any special talents?**

Summer is a 13 years old Golden Retriever who can destroy anything, but tennis balls are her favorite!!!!! She is a Cancer survivor and is also blind. In 2016 she received the Wodian Animal Hero Award by the Pennsylvania Veterinary Medical Association and in 2018 she received a K9 hero award for the work she has done as a Crisis Response Canine.

**How long have you worked with Crisis Response Canines?**

Summer and I have been doing Crisis Response work together for 8 years. We have also been a therapy dog team for 12 years.

**Tell about your most memorable experience(s) working with Crisis Response Canines.**

I would have to say my first year at Camp Susquehanna holds a special place in my heart. It was one of those experiences that changed my life. That was when Summer was beginning to lose her eye sight. She got up on stage for the first talent show at camp to do her tricks. While up there, she struggled tremendously with her ‘talent’, as the echo was too loud in the room and her senses became overwhelmed. She really struggled to perform her tricks. When we exited the stage some of the little boys from the Kites ran over and hugged Summer and said, “It’s okay Summer, we get stage fright too. You tried and that’s all that matters”. This touched my heart to see these young boys embrace Summer’s struggle and try to make her feel better as this was usually her role. Outside of camp, I would have to say one of my most memorable experiences with Crisis Response Canines would be the 10 and then the 15 year anniversaries of 9-11 in New York City. Working with survivors and family members of victims was what made me pursue getting and training a dog for this kind of work. But to be totally honest, every experience I have had doing Crisis Work has left its mark on me and I have never had a significant interaction with another person that hasn’t changed my thinking or left a lasting impression. It’s about helping others heal and having someone verbalize what you have done to help them that stays with you forever.

**What do you and your dog do for fun?**

Summer lives to have fun. We hike, swim, play ball (she may be blind but she can still play a good game of fetch by sniffing out her tennis ball). We train weekly in advanced level obedience classes and she loves to spend time with her 8 year old human cousin, her two younger doggie brothers (Linus and Prime) and her younger doggie sister (Xaria), and her best doggie friends. Anywhere she can be with people she is happy!

**Tell me about YOU!**

Anyone that knows me knows I have no spare time! I work full time as a Director of a mental health/school program for youth. The kids I work with have mental health diagnoses and cannot be maintained in a traditional public school setting. I work part-time as a veterinary technician which I have done for most of my life. I also work part-time as a dog trainer teaching group classes and doing individual behavioral consults. I am always volunteering for something, joining an organization that represents something close to my heart, or finding a new adventure to explore. My hobbies all include my dogs. All 4 dogs (3 Golden Retrievers and a black lab) are registered therapy dogs, Summer is a Crisis Response Canine, and my youngest canine (Prime) is in the training program to become a Crisis Response Canine also. During down time I am training my dogs, trying to spend time outside, or with my friends and family. Thanks to my work with Summer I have also gotten to partake in another favorite thing to do which is to travel. Besides the 4 dogs, I have 3 cats and a 31 year old Blue Front Amazon Parrot. We also almost always have doggie friends staying at the house or foster puppies through the rescue I work with.

**What would you like people to know about you?**

I love and collect elephants. My nephew and pets are my world and hold the largest place in my heart. I have a true passion for children, women’s issues, helping my community and the world I live in, animals, and making this world a better place. I enjoy spending time with my family and friends and enjoy seeking out new adventures and learning. I believe we should never stop growing and learning because then we become stagnant. If I could go anywhere in the world (all expenses paid) I would go to Africa on safari to, of course, see the elephants and all that nature has to offer in this beautiful place. My ultimate ‘when I grow up job’ would be involving dogs and kids together. Crisis work is my life and I love what I can do for others and see the impact my canines and I make on the people they encounter.

**CINDI & REBA**  
*(Third Year at Camp)*

**Tell us about Reba:**

Reba is my 10 year old Cavalier King Charles Spaniel partner. Her nickname is Diva and that is what you will most frequently hear people calling her.

**How long have you and Reba been working together?**

Although Reba and I have worked together since she was 12 weeks old; doing therapy work since she was 2, certifying as a Dog Scout at age 2, achieving agility and rally titles since age 2, and NATIONAL Crisis Response Canine work for the last 4 years; this is only our 3rd year at the burn camp.
What are some of your favorite things to do with Reba?
Reba is a woman about town. She loves to dress up, kayak, hike, and also paints to raise money for rescues. She has also worked on various photo shoots for commercials and print ads. She loves all her work (therapy, scouts, crisis response, fundraising for rescues) and is happiest when she is sharing her love with individuals dealing with life’s trials. Nothing makes her feel better than watching someone she has approached turn a frown upside down as they find the happy place within.

Tell me about YOU!
I am also a woman who has enjoyed helping and although my business day for years was in the hospitality industry I was also an active volunteer as an EMT for a fire department, an instructor/trainer for CPR & First Aid, and disaster responder for American Red Cross. I retired from the hospitality industry 5 years ago and now do my part time passion full time— I get to work full time with dogs. I am a certified dog trainer, certified Pet CPR & FA instructor, and working on my animal behaviorist certification. My 3 dogs, and my various client’s dogs, continue to compete in agility, rally, and obedience.

What else would you like us to know?
Best way to sum up Reba and myself.... we love sharing love and can’t wait to see everyone at this year’s camp.

JUDY & CORAL
(First Year at Camp Susquehanna)

Tell me about Coral:
Coral is a Golden Retriever who is 12½ years old who loves swimming, wrestling with her sister and cuddling with me! She has been doing Therapy work for 10 years.

How long have you worked with National Crisis Response Canines?
We have been with National Crisis Response Canines for almost 4 years. In that time we have been honored to share her skills in helping many people deal with crisis situations. My most memorable experience was when we were requested to visit a patient in a coma and once she lay down beside her, the patient woke up. Next would be being requested to come to a school that had a Crisis situation.

What do you and Coral like to do for fun?
Coral and I love to go to the beach or a local lake to swim. We love to travel and rough house! She loves bones and stuffed dogs!

Tell me about YOU!
I am retired and spend most of my time working with Coral and her sister, Lexie who is now training for NCRC. I enjoy meeting and helping people so having the privilege of doing it with my dogs is wonderful.

What else would you like us to know?
I was a Physical Therapist in the Army for 8½ years and served in Vietnam. I have had experience with Burn patients and am really looking forward to giving them a happy experience. I try to give back to my fellow Vets, too. I have 3 children and 5 grandchildren.

The Crisis Response Canine Teams at Camp Susquehanna are generously funded by Patt Veterinary Hospital, Gilbertsville, PA, and trained by National Crisis Response Canines.
Paying It Forward

Community organizations such as civic clubs typically have a lifespan. This is particularly evident today as once robust organizations like the Kiwanis, Lions, Optimists and others see their membership aging and their numbers shrinking. These organizations have provided critical support for worthy causes and have provided a social outlet for persons of like mind. As many of them disband or diminish, is the community capital they have generated also lost?

Not in the case of the M. Elvin Byler Memorial Sertoma Club of Lancaster County, PA. In 1992, the Lancaster Sertoma wished to honor one of its founding members, M. Elvin Byler, who tragically died in a fire-engulfed crashed plane. The solution they embraced was to start and fund a summer camp for youth burn survivors. Thus, the M. Elvin Byler Memorial Sertoma was born and so was Camp Susquehanna.

Fast forward 20 years or so and the dedicated members of the Byler Sertoma who created and sustained Camp Susquehanna reached the decision that their shrinking numbers and reduced energy levels were not sufficient to continue the demanding tasks of planning, staffing, managing and funding a summer camp program. In 2015, the Byler Sertoma ceded the operation and management of Camp Susquehanna to the Burn Prevention Network. The Club, however, continued to provide very generous financial support to the program.

On March 5, 2018, the M. Elvin Byler Sertoma Club officially disbanded. That is not the end of the story, however. Prior to officially disbanding, the remaining members voted to establish a Donor Advised Fund managed by Raymond James Financial Services from the considerable budget surplus that remained, naming the Burn Prevention Network’s Camp Susquehanna as the primary beneficiary. As a result, the loving legacy of this extraordinary group of citizens will live on into perpetuity. As long as Camp Susquehanna continues to operate, it will annually receive between $7,000-$8,000 from the M. Elvin Byler Memorial Sertoma Club, even long after the Club has completed its life-cycle.

Our respect and gratitude to all of the recent and past members of the Byler Sertoma for years of service in the past and years of support in the future!

Training Opportunity

Nationally recognized trainer and speaker, Paul Schwartzman, M.S., L.M.H.C., D.A.P.A. will provide specialized training on “Trauma and Youth Fire Misuse” for area mental health professionals on Monday, August 20, 2018, and a second program on “Youth Fire Misuse and First Responders” on Tuesday, August 21st. Both training programs will be conducted at the LVHN Innovation Center, One City Center, 707 Hamilton Street, Allentown, PA.

Paul Schwartzman is the Executive Director of the Fingerlakes Regional Burn Association. He is a licensed mental health counselor and consultant who has been working with families of children who misuse fire for more than 34 years. He was among those who conducted original research and developed one of the first ever juvenile fire setter intervention programs in the United States.

At the session for mental health professionals on Monday, August 20th, Paul will discuss research that correlates trauma and childhood fire misuse. He will also suggest effective professional assessment techniques and treatment methods. Continuing education credit hours will be offered for Pennsylvania Social Workers, Marriage & Family Therapists and Professional Counselors. The training will run from 8:30am–4:00pm. The cost is $50 per person with lunch provided.

On Tuesday, August 21st, Paul will discuss aspects of youth fire misuse that affect first responders including, communicating with suspected youth fire setters, understanding children on the Autism Spectrum and effective educational intervention practices. Participants will earn Pre-hospital continuing education credits. The training will run from 8:30 am– 4:00 pm. The cost is $50 per person with lunch provided.

For more information and to register, visit www.burnprevention.org/PAUL2018.
Pennies for a Cure!

How often can it be claimed that for mere pennies, a serious, even life-threatening injured can be prevented altogether? Such is the case with portable gas container flashback explosions!

According to the American Burn Association, “Portable fuel containers can pose a serious threat to consumers.” Under specific conditions, something known as a flashback explosion can occur. During a flashback explosion, gas vapor from a fuel container escapes and comes in contact with a spark or flame causing an ignition that flashes back into the gas can. This can lead to a flame explosion with potentially catastrophic results.

Fortunately, installing a simple device called a “flame arrestor” can prevent an estimated 18,500 annual gas can injuries (CPSC NEISS Database). A flame arrestor is a small piece of mesh or perforated disk designed to disrupt flame. It costs about $0.02 - $0.05 per fuel container.

Standards for flame arrestors are already well developed. Flame arrestors are currently included in products such as metal “safety” gas cans, fuel tanks, and charcoal lighter fluid. They are required in workplace fuel containers but are not required in consumer portable fuel containers. It is estimated that there are 100 million portable fuel containers without flame arrestors in use by unsuspecting consumers with more being sold every day.

H.R. 919, the Portable Fuel Container Safety Act, introduced by Reps. Mike Thompson (D-CA) and David Joyce (R-OH), https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/919, would direct the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) to promulgate a final rule establishing clearly defined standards for installing flame arrestors in all portable fuel containers. A voluntary effort to accomplish this has gone on for over a decade with few results. The Burn Prevention Network supports passage of H.R. 919 and urges you to educate your Congressman/woman on the importance of this bill.

Welcome New Board Members!

The board of directors of the Burn Prevention Network recently elected two new members. They are Lisa Kupper, Huntingdon Valley, PA, and Santo Piccolomini, Uniontown, PA.

Lisa Kupper (pronounced Cooper), along with husband, Todd, suffered one of a parent’s greatest nightmares, witnessing the burn injury of their young daughter. This injury, and the subsequent hospitalization, surgeries, recovery and ongoing treatments changed her life forever. Lisa and Todd quickly learned that physical healing from a devastating burn is just the beginning of the journey. Their experience prompted them to found the “Heal the Burn Foundation” to help other parents navigate the emotional and unfamiliar territory of caring for a child with burn injuries. Heal the Burn Foundation also provided direct support to child burn survivors including sponsorship of Camp Susquehanna. On the career front, Lisa is employed by Aberdeen Asset Management Group, Philadelphia, PA.

Santo Piccolomini is also well acquainted with burn injury. Santo and his brother are the principals of Seiferth Sign Co., Pittsburgh, PA. In 2015, while installing a sign on a building near high-voltage power, an electric arc sent 13,000 volts surging through his body. Santo spent almost two months in a trauma burn unit and underwent 19 surgeries to save his arms and maintain movement in his left shoulder. He fought through many hours of physical therapy and at age 21, came to fully appreciate the value of life and those who had supported him. Even before a full recovery, he wanted to give back by volunteering at Camp Susquehanna for children with burn injuries. Following that experience he organized a fund raiser for Camp and continued to serve as a counselor in subsequent years.

Lisa Kupper and Santo Piccolomini embody the dedication, generosity and spirit of those men and women who serve as members of the board of directors of the BPN. We welcome them aboard!