



News Line

Employee Saves A Life At Chili Bar

(August 1, 2002) What started out yesterday afternoon as a routine inspection switched in a heartbeat to a lifesaving adventure, as District employee Lonn Maier came to the aid of a man being crushed by a truck.

Maier works as an environmental coordinator with the hydro relicensing project, which means he spends a lot of time around SMUD's Upper American River hydroelectric dams and powerhouses. About 1 p.m. yesterday, he was parked and waiting to join a PG&E employee to inspect a temperature sensor in a remote location near PG&E's Chili Bar dam.

On a nearby road, Maier watched a man drive a truck, a 1987 Dodge pickup, to the Nugget Campground, get out, and examine the locked gate. Then, leaving a baby and a preschool-aged child sitting in the truck, the man walked away a few yards, apparently looking for help. The emergency brake suddenly disengaged and the truck began rolling down the slope with the children inside. It broke through a gate and continued to roll slowly down the hill.

The man saw what was happening and raced back, trying to reach the emergency brake of the moving vehicle. Instead, he was pinned between the 3,500-pound truck and the metal gatepost.

Maier reached the truck, put his hands to the back, and pushed it about five feet up the hill -- far enough for the man to get free.

"He looked like he had a couple of ribs broken," Maier said. "I could tell he was going into shock—his skin was

really pale and he was sweating." Maier moved the truck to a level spot in the shade and helped the man to sit down. He used his radio to contact Fresh Pond employee Elvira Chairez, who in turn called a Life Flight crew and the El Dorado County Sheriff. Within 10 minutes the Life Flight helicopter had landed on Highway 193 and was helping to stabilize the injured man.

"The kids were so frightened," Maier said. "The baby was screaming and the little girl was crying—she was wondering if it was her fault." Maier picked up the baby and took the preschooler by the hand and sat down with them, to quiet the children and answer their questions. "I wanted to help them know that things would be OK," he said. "I told them the ambulance workers were there to help their daddy, and that the policemen would take them to their mother." He stayed with the children until their mother was located, when a sheriff's officer took them to her. By that time, Maier had succeeded in helping them to calm down. The children are three years and eighteen months old.

Maier said he is grateful for his three years of experience as a police officer. "All that training helped," he said. "I didn't have to collect my emotions. I just knew what to do."

The man, Placerville resident Matthew Shepherd, 32, is recovering at Sutter Roseville Memorial Hospital today, suffering from three broken ribs and a punctured lung. "I was being crushed," Shepherd said. "I would have died. He saved my life."

Maier credits the father. "The real hero of this whole thing is their dad," he said. "He risked his life to avert what could have been a devastating ending."
