

'It's awesome to see her doing so well. It's good closure for us.' **Christopher Jennings**, paramedic

After the rescue, a reunion

Ireland Nugent meets first responders who helped save her after a lawn mower accident.

BY KEYONNA SUMMERS
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LARGO — Christopher Jennings, a **Sunstar** paramedic not prone to tears, thought he was all cried out.

On the scene of an accidental amputation last month, Jennings had choked back tears at the “gut-wrenching” screams of Jerry Nugent, who had accidentally backed over his toddler daughter’s legs with a riding mower.

After the young patient had been loaded into a Bayflite helicopter, Jennings sat with co-workers sobbing in a church parking lot. Jennings, upset for days afterward, said he wept again when reports of 2-year-old Ireland Nugent’s recovery hit the news.

So Jennings was surprised Wednesday when his breath caught and tears threatened to blur the sight of the smiling, blue-eyed girl during a reunion with nearly a dozen first responders who helped save Ireland’s life.

“I’m not an emotional guy, but it’s awesome to see her doing so well,” said Jennings, 33. “It’s good closure for us.”

The reunion at the Sunstar Paramedic headquarters in Largo was a special treat for the Pinellas County 911 dispatcher,

» See **IRELAND, 6B**

three-person Bayflite crew, emergency medical technicians and supervisors who typically never learn the outcomes of the people they help.

Clutching a white Bayflite teddy bear, Ireland — wearing an American-flag motif dress and a red bow in her hair — alternately buried her face in her mother’s shoulder and laughed as the rescuers signed her bubblegum-pink cast.

Palm Harbor Fire Rescue responders couldn’t make it because of a schedule conflict.

“God bless all you guys,” Jerry

Nugent told the responders.

“We couldn’t say thank you enough,” said Ireland’s mom, Nicole Nugent. “This is harder on us than it is on her. She really is okay.”

Dispatcher Alexis Frymoyer, 25, of St. Pete Beach recalled straining to hear the calm male voice who explained through the staticky connection and yelling in the background that a child had been hurt by a lawn mower.

On scene, just a mile from Jennings’ own Palm Harbor home, paramedics and firefighters determined Ireland needed to be rushed by helicopter to Tampa General Hospital.

“We explained everything that we were doing to her, and even though she’s so little she nodded as if she understood us,” Jennings said. “Even with some of the painful things we had to do, she didn’t flinch, she took it and it was amazing. That’s what broke our hearts, seeing her in such terrible condition, but being such a trouper.”

Jennings credited the Nugent’s neighbor, a nurse, with saving Ireland’s life.

“Without the pressure she held to the bleeding extremities, (Ireland) could have easily bled out before we ever made it on scene,” he said.

In the three weeks since Ireland was released from the hospital, the Nugents have nervously watched the resilient child crawl and dance alongside her siblings, frolic with peers at the school where her mother teaches and tumble at the playground.

“She was obviously very sick and she is so vibrant now. A little

spitfire,” said Bayflite nurse June Poxon.

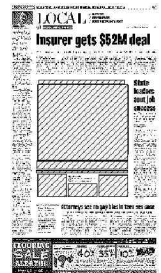
Nicole Nugent said Wednesday’s reunion brought closure to a night she remembers little about except for the accident.

“They helped save my daughter,” she said. “They are a part of my family now.”

Each of the responders, however, shunned being called a hero.

“This is the reason we do what we do,” Frymoyer said. “It makes the job that much easier.”

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Nicole Nugent holds daughter Ireland while Bayflite paramedic Chris Williams signs her cast. Looking on at the reunion are, from left, Bayflite pilot Amund Moe, Sunstar paramedic Christopher Jennings and Bayflite nurse June Poxon.