

‘He did so much for everybody’: Remembering Bothell firefighter Kirk Robinson

Robinson, remembered by loved ones as a selfless and genuinely kind person, died on Oct. 4.

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Wednesday, October 16, 2019 8:30 am*

“He was a walking angel.”

That’s how Tinya Anderson, a Mercer Island resident, describes Kirk Robinson, a born-and-raised Islander and lieutenant for the Bothell Fire Department (BFD).

Robinson died Oct. 4 at the age of 42. He is survived by parents Gary and Lori, brother Clay, wife Jessica and their two children, Gavin (10) and Levi (8).

Pat Angell, who neighbored the Robinson family decades ago, remembers the firefighter as “the sweetest little boy” growing up.

“He did so much for anybody,” she recalled.

Robinson graduated from Mercer Island High School in 1995. Later, he studied kinesiology and sports medicine at Westmont College. In 1999, he joined Mercer Island’s auxiliary firefighting force; then, in April 2001, he was hired to work at BFD full time.

Robinson was close to the community he was raised in until his death. In his youth, he served as a lifeguard at the Stroum Jewish Community Center. He was also a dedicated member of the Mercer Island Presbyterian Church (MIPC), of which he was a board member in adulthood and, when he was younger, a youth leader.

Robinson made many major contributions to his church throughout his years there, but among the most notable was his participation in a missionary-esque program it backed.



Clockwise from left: Jessie, Kirk, Gavin and Levi Robinson. Photo courtesy Gary Robinson

In high school, he helped build houses in Mexico for the less fortunate; then, eventually, he started leading the trips.

"Kirk was the person we all would like to be," his father Gary said.

Lindsay Murphy, an associate pastor at MIPC, had known Robinson since college and spoke of his dedication to his faith and his church community.

"He always had a heart for wanting to invest in the lives of the youth coming to church," she said.

Beyond his community

Robinson didn't just make an impact regionally.

Following the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, he volunteered to assist with ground zero clean up. After Hurricane Katrina devastated Florida and Louisiana in 2005, Robinson and eight other firefighters hailing from Bothell and Redmond traveled to the East Coast to assist the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in mitigating effects.

"He never seemed to want anything back in return," Murphy said. "In fact, I think he was uncomfortable with receiving help because he liked to be the one who helped."

Paul Barrett, a pastor who previously worked with MIPC and who knew Robinson for about 20 years, echoed this.

"He was the guy you called and without reservations would be there in the blink of an eye...and he did that for all circles," he said, adding that Robinson never sought to be recognized for his generosity.

On Feb. 23, 2017, Robinson was diagnosed with stage four metastatic melanoma. When he went public with his diagnosis on June 4, 2018, on social media, he received support in abundance. Shortly afterward, he was given a "Hometown Heroes" award at Mercer Island's Summer Celebration parade.

The diagnosis and its aftereffects didn't stop Robinson from being involved with his community.

Anderson, who met Robinson last summer, joined forces with the latter and several community members after Mercer Island's annual Fourth of July picnic event was canceled due to city budget cuts. The group took it upon themselves to make sure that the long-running program didn't leave the community.

"Kirk had this very can-do attitude," Anderson said. "He didn't want to focus on regret or frustration...he was like, 'What can we do moving forward?' He did it with grace and motivation."

Gary said his son was also behind a free-for-all annual event during which he'd gather Islanders to play soccer on Thanksgiving Day — usually adults-versus-kids scrimmages. Almost every Halloween, Robinson hosted a taco-themed dinner event — something Gary said will be missed this year. And with the help of Anderson and a couple of others, Robinson helped revive a "firehouse munch" event that, like the Fourth of July picnic, would have otherwise been hampered by budget cuts.

Honoring Kirk

Robinson continued to receive community support as he battled his illness shortly before his death. On Sept. 29, scores of Mercer Island residents met up in a field to take a group photo showing their support. On social media, friends and acquaintances wished Robinson well.

When his BFD heard about his passing, the department dispatched someone to bring an American flag over to the hospice at which Robinson had been staying to be placed on his body. As he left, hospice staff lined the walls in his honor, according to a press release. Afterward, a motorcade comprising Bothell and Mercer Island officials accompanied his hearse on the highway as he was brought to a funeral home in Bellevue.

Loved ones noted that it isn't the support for Robinson that's surprising. It's "the layers of stories," as noted by Barrett, that's been so unexpected.

"I've never seen anything like the current outpouring...it's extraordinary the people that love this man," Angell said.

"I didn't know the magnitude of the effect he had," Murphy said, adding that, shortly after his death, her feed was packed with remembrances of her friend.

Anderson said she and some city officials are working to ensure that there is a dedication to Robinson at Mercer Island's annual tree lighting ceremony in December. She also said that there is a possibility that a skate park in town that Robinson frequented in his youth might be given his namesake.

What made Kirk unique

Those close to Robinson spoke of him as having a special quality hard to find in others.

"He possessed that magical 'x factor' that made everyone from his closest loved ones to the stranger on the street feel known and secure," longtime friend Stephanie Boyer, who is the director of tuition programs at MIPC, said in an email. "He advocated for the good in people and modeled love in action on a daily basis."

"He was the real deal," Gary said.

Robinson's memorial service will be held Oct. 24 at Overlake Christian Church, 9900 Willows Rd. in Redmond.



Photo courtesy Gary Robinson Kirk Robinson and his oldest son, Gavin, on a ski trip.



Robinson being sworn in as a lieutenant of the Bothell Fire Department. Photo courtesy Gary Robinson