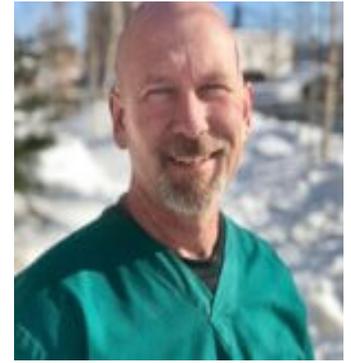


CHA Spotlight – Robert Keeling

During his 27 years as a paramedic/fireman in his home state of Colorado, Dale Keeling thought he knew a lot about providing care to the ill and injured. Then he fell in love with an Alaska girl, followed her back to her hometown of Manley, and learned about the health aide career. “Her dad was a health aide in Manley in the 70s, and he talked to me a lot about the job...I thought that with my background, the training would be pretty easy, and that being health aide was not that dissimilar to being a paramedic.” He was wrong.



His experience certainly helped him in the training course, but he learned pretty quickly that as a health aide his base of knowledge was expected to be much wider. “My job as a paramedic was basically emergency medicine. But health aides do urgent care, chronic care, administer antibiotics, suture wounds and a lot of other things I never did as a paramedic. We have to learn about the whole body in much greater depth than with my previous training. And the clinical exams we conduct with patients are much more thorough than anything I did before.

Keeling says that one of the best parts of being a health aide is that he has the time to get to know people, which makes it easier to figure out the best way to help them get and stay well. “And it is a joy to see people out in the community a few days after I’ve worked with them in the clinic, and have them come up to me and say they feel better. I feel like I truly make a difference in the lives of people, in the lives of my neighbors.”

The most frustrating part of his job is one frequently mentioned by health care providers across the country: Dr. Google. Easy access to the internet is a blessing but the information available is not always correct and people can end up giving themselves the wrong diagnosis, which sometimes delays proper treatment.

Keeling’s job also has become more complicated since the corona virus pandemic. “There is more testing for people who travel, I have to make sure we have a good supply of things like masks, I have more reports to do and more meetings with other health care providers to make sure we are hearing the latest information about how to avoid the virus.” It all takes more time and coordination.

When he is not at his health aide job, Keeling is usually working at his second job: doing the many tasks involved in trying to live a largely subsistence lifestyle. “My wife Katrina Andrulli and I are busy all the time. There is fishing, hunting, 10 cords of wood to put up every year, fixing things that break, maintaining a large garden, preserving food for the winter. I just bought a place with a sawmill, so am learning all about that. It is never ending. Mind you, I am not complaining. I am blessed to be in such a gorgeous place, living a healthier lifestyle. I am 53 and I’m convinced that all the chores keep me young.”

Dale Keeling’s supervisor, Ryan Clairmont, had only glowing things to say about him. “We are incredibly lucky to have a guy with the kind of skill set he has working as a health aide. He is a huge asset to Manley and to our program. He was re-certified so that he can now teach the Basic Life Skills program, which incorporates CPR training, to our health aides. It is a pleasure working with him.”