

Firefighters put lifesaving skills to work on return flight from fire engine inspection

Costa Mesa Fire & Rescue Division Chief Jason Pyle was settled into his plane seat high over the skies of Colorado and enjoying a movie with his headphones on when he heard what sounded like a call for medical assistance.

Pyle, Fire Engineer Steve Cathey and fleet maintenance supervisor Gant Corum were just returning from Appleton Wisconsin where they were doing the final inspections on two new fire engines.

He pulled off his headphones and again heard the flight attendant put out a call for medical emergency and asked that anyone with medical training come back to assist.

Pyle peered to the back of airplane and knew his services were needed.

“There’s a guy all balled up on the floor, and he was in respiratory distress,” he said as he quickly walked back toward the plane to assist the senior-aged man. “He was blue, and he didn’t look like he was breathing.”

Pyle and the flight attendants slid him over to a portion of the plane where they could work on him. He was later joined by a nurse, a cardiologist and Cathey who helped with the medical charting and got the man’s medical history from his daughter.

As they performed patient care and began treatment on him the man was initially unconscious but as they provided the first aid his condition stabilized.

Meanwhile, the team of responders were able to contact the plane's captain and advised him the flight needed to be diverted to Denver.

"That was like a roller coaster ride," Pyle said as the plane quickly descended to the Mile High City.

Once the landed, he and Cathey met Denver Fire at the door to provide them with the information about the man, who they learned was 90 years old. By that time, he was talking and conscious and his color came back.

"The most important thing was getting him into a stable condition and providing him appropriate medical care," Pyle said. "We got him in that window where he was in a savable moment."

Pyle gives lots of credit to the flight crew for saving the man's life.

"They are the ones who raised the concern and they are the ones who found him," he said. "Their fast action to look for help and alert others and their ability to recognize an emergency was key."

The other thing that assisted was the man's daughter was able to provide his medical history to Pyle and others helping him.

That helped provide a jump start on his medical care and Pyle recommends that residents carry a medical bracelet or necklace that identifies medical conditions in case they are ever in need.

And if saving a life wasn't enough, two family friends who were traveling with the man, stayed on the plane but didn't have a ride home. So Steve Cathey gave them a ride home to Los Alamitos. And those friends have since kept him up date on the man's condition.

"They sent me a couple letters saying that he is doing good,"

Cathey said.

For Pyle and Cathey, it was good knowing their training came in handy that day.

“It’s part of what we do,” Cathey said.

Pyle agreed.

“It’s good to know when you have ability to help, that you are able to help,” Pyle said. “It doesn’t matter if you are in the streets of Costa Mesa or flying over Colorado.”