

Amanda Bear Launch – Sept. 2004



Amanda Bears' bring kids comfort

Andrea Bailey, Waterloo Chronicle, Sept. 22, 2004



Waterloo Region Emergency Services are honouring one of their own as the Amanda Bear program was launched last Thursday. Here, paramedics Jim Topham (left) and Mike Bettles hold two of the comfort bears in memory of Amanda Finch.

Children who require emergency medical attention in this region are always given a teddy bear for comfort.

But now, along with that bear, comes an angel watching down on them from above. The Region of Waterloo's emergency medical services department, with the support from local Optimists and Twin city Jaycees, announced last Thursday that its Bearamedics program has been renamed the Amanda Bears program, in memory of 21-year old Amanda Finch, a paramedic who died last year.

Finch, who had been part of the region's EMS department since she spent her high school co-op assisting local paramedics, died in her sleep while recovering from tonsil surgery.

"We don't want to forget Amanda," said John Prno, the region's director of emergency medical services. "She was a real sweetheart, very feeling and compassionate towards her co-workers and her patients. She did absolutely everything the right way."

Prno said renaming the brown, furry bears, which paramedics give out to children in the ambulance en route to the hospital, is "perfect fit" in honour of Finch.

"You know, you can put all the plaques up you like, but it's not like remembering the person. "Knowing that we've renamed the bears after Amanda, I know, would put a great big smile on her face."

Prno said paramedics hand out between 140 and 150 bears a year to children, as well as mentally challenged adults, in need of comfort. We'd love not to give away any bears

because when we do it means someone is either sick or hurt,” he said. “But the bears work wonders in relieving (patients’) stress a bit. We hear stories from parents who say that months later their child still won’t give up their bear. It is very moving.”

Launching the program was bittersweet for his department, Prno said. “We are used to saving lives, and when we realized we couldn’t save one of our own people, it was very traumatic. It still is,” Prno said. “It is too bad we have to do something like this because it means we’ve lost a good employee and a good friend.”

“But these bears represent who Amanda was, and that makes it a good-feeling program all over.”

Message from Lynn Finch

I cried tears of sorrow, joy and gratitude when I read this story. Sorrow because we miss Amanda so much. Joy for the legacy of love she left us. Gratitude to those who embraced the idea of Amanda Bears and made them a reality.

It is so wonderful to see her EMS family and friends so passionately remembering her. The tributes and events over the past year have been overwhelming and amazing. God bless all who have walked beside us for your never ending love and support. I think all the love Amanda gave when she was here is now being reciprocated back to her. I believe the energy of love is not confined to this life, she continues to touch the lives of so many who never knew her. When people ask why the bears are called Amanda Bears? She will be remembered for the person she was, kind, caring and compassionate. Amanda is indeed smiling because she knows, through these bears she continues her life’s calling, helping others in need.

We give thanks each day for Amanda. Despite her twenty one short years, she passed this way, inspired all who knew her and made a difference.