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Matters of Life and Death: The Flight of Paramedic Mike Choate '97

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Michael Cho
Flight Paramedic

LIFELIGHT OF MAINE
FLIGHT CREW

Lifelight of Maine
FLIGHT PARAMEDIC
MIKE

Matters of Life and Death

Helicopter paramedic Mike Choate '97 flies to the rescue

Mike Choate '97 is a LifeFlight helicopter paramedic, but one day this summer his most dramatic case, and Choate's most impressive performance, came when a patient literally walked into a Lewiston, Maine, emergency room.

Responding to a Code 11 emergency call on the hospital's PA, Choate strode into the ER, dressed in his blue flight-suit coveralls, to find a trauma team including two physicians assessing the case. On the gurney was a man with a gaping, diagonal chest wound caused by a circular saw. Choate positioned himself at the patient's head, asked the man some questions, ordered medication, and explained to the patient what was going to happen. With the ER doctor's permission and after anesthesia was administered, Choate intubated the patient, inserting a rigid, plastic airway down the bloodied man's windpipe. It's a simultaneously delicate and slightly brutal procedure with life-or-death consequences.

The sedated patient was trundled off to surgery, emergency over, prognosis good. And as Choate slipped out and walked down the hallway, the trauma surgeon pursued him—not to challenge Choate's take-charge attitude, but to thank him for helping.

"When these guys [LifeFlight paramedics] come into the room, the whole place calms down," said Tom Judge, executive director and founder of LifeFlight of Maine, the nonprofit that is Maine's only medical scene-response helicopter service.

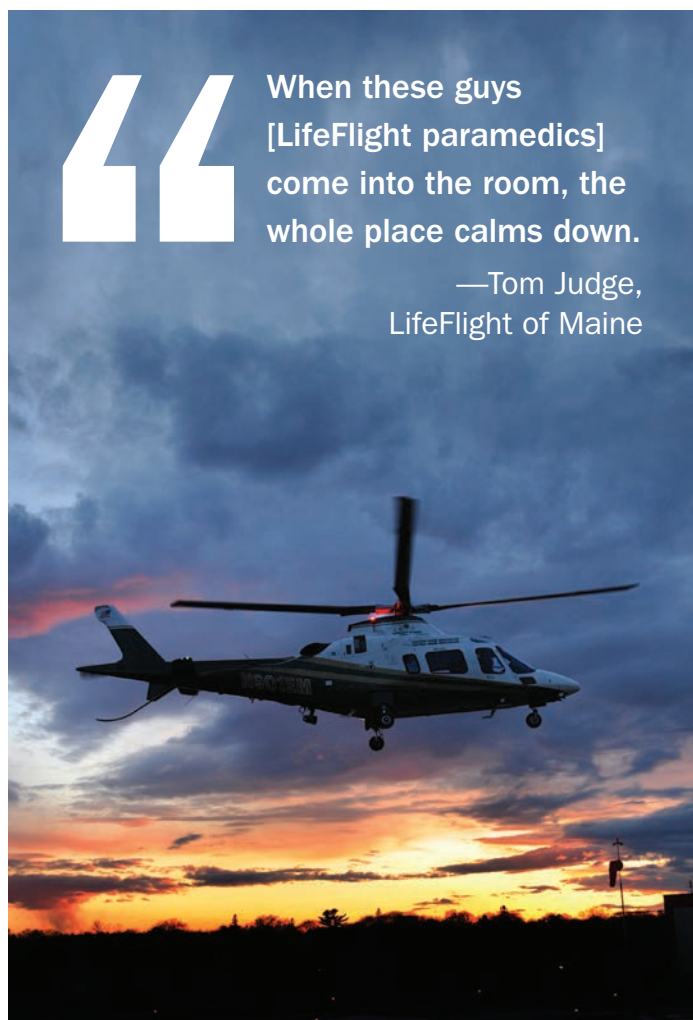
Choate and his colleagues do it all—sometimes outdoors, sometimes in the dark, sometimes during Maine winter, sometimes all three. He has used night-vision goggles to find and help save a depressed person lost in a Maine swamp. He's used the helicopter's onboard blood supply to save the life of a woman he found unconscious after her throat was slit when a drug deal went bad. And he recently coauthored a medical research paper on intubation that Judge says will change the way emergency medicine is practiced in the field.

Choate was interested in medicine when he arrived at Colby from Gardiner, Maine, but his calling found him when he took the Emergency Medical Technician Jan Plan. He was working for a local ambulance company before he graduated, and he's undergone intensive, never-ending training and testing to be certified as a critical-care transport paramedic.

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When these guys [LifeFlight paramedics] come into the room, the whole place calms down.

—Tom Judge,
LifeFlight of Maine



A helicopter carrying paramedic Mike Choate '97 takes off after transporting a patient to Central Maine Medical Center in Lewiston.

As the quality assurance and process improvement coordinator for LifeFlight, Choate puts his mathematics major to work tracking the efficacy of medical procedures and protocols. The benefit is felt across Maine.

"The thing I like most about my job is being able to bring critical care and acute resuscitation to patients wherever they may be," he said, "whether it's at a small hospital on an island off the coast or in the Allagash Wilderness Waterway."
—Stephen Collins '74

More about Mike Choate '97, including additional photos and video, at colby.edu/mag 