

Professionally and personally, Brookeville man has what it takes to care for others

by **Terri Hogan**
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In early March, Brookeville resident Justin Stine was diagnosed with COVID-19.

While it was a difficult and frightening time, it wasn't long before he recovered and went right back to doing what he most enjoys — caring for others.

And that care includes patients who might be suffering from the very virus that he contracted more than two months ago.

Stine, 25, works full-time as a nurse in the Intensive Care Unit at Holy Cross Hospital in Silver Spring and a couple times each week as an

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George Smith/Sandy Spring Volunteer Fire Department



Justin Stine

Justin Stine, an Intensive Care Unit nurse and Emergency Medical Services lieutenant with Sandy Spring Volunteer Fire Department, knows better than most how to care for the community during the coronavirus pandemic. The Olney-area resident was diagnosed with COVID-19 in early March. He has fully recovered and is back to work.

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Emergency Medical Services lieutenant for Sandy Spring Volunteer Fire Department (SSVFD).

He joined SSVFD at age 17 and plans to continue serving there as a way to give back to the community in which he grew up.

Stine was one of the first members of the county Fire and Rescue Service to test positive for COVID-19. He is unsure how he contracted the virus — it could have been from working at the hospital or fire department, or could have been from a grocery store.

"I was very sick," Stine said. "It was in the early part of the pandemic, so there was a lot of uncertainty."

His symptoms, including shortness of breath and general weakness, led him to the emergency room.

He successfully recovered and after 14 days of quarantine he returned to work at both jobs.

"I was scared and nervous to go back, partly because after 14 days I was so out of the loop," he said. "I tried to keep up with emails, but things were constantly changing."

But now that he is back, he said his experience has given him a new perspective.

"Now I try to put myself in the minds of the patients," Stine said. "I have a new sense of empathy for taking care of them because I know what they are going through."

In an effort to continue to help others recover from the virus, he recently donated his plasma, which is being used to help treat the COVID-19 patients he is caring for at Holy Cross.

"The plasma has antibodies to fight the virus," he said. "Working at Holy Cross, it felt like the right thing to do to help the patients. I may be able to help their situation, and that bag of plasma that I hang may be my own."

Stine says the fact that things have come full-circle is surreal.

"Not only am I able to help people by administering care, but also by adding to their healing process," he said. "That is cool to be a part of."

He plans to continue donating plasma once a month as long as there is a need.

Stine considers himself to be a "pretty dedicated person."

He restored the Riggs family cemetery off Bordly Drive as his Eagle Scout project. A few weeks later, when it was destroyed by vandals, he restored the entire cemetery once again.

"I enjoy being helpful; that's just who I am," he said.

Others agree.

Sharon Graves, director of Critical Care at Holy Cross Hospital, hired Stine a little over a year ago as a new nursing grad.

"Justin is a very caring nurse who is always willing to lend a helping hand to anyone who needs it," she said. "He makes a point to personally say 'hello' to me whenever he is working. In the short time he has been here, he has grown tremendously in his abilities as a critical care nurse. We are proud to have him as part of our staff."

His fire department superiors offer similar accolades.

"I am incredibly proud of Justin for continuing to put others before himself and trying to save lives with everything he does in his life," SSVFD Chief Mitch Dinowitz said.

Stine reminds people to keep wearing masks when possible to "flatten the curve," and encourages those who test positive to consider donating plasma.

"That's just an awesome way to give back during this pandemic," he said.