

Dedication Is Rescue Workers' Middle Name



BARBARA RUBY, CHIEF of the Calabash rescue squad, packs a "jump and go bag" for EMTs to use on a house call.

STAFF PHOTO BY MARJORIE MEGIVERN

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Labor comes cheap in volunteer rescue squads. These working men and women (a minority are retirees) train, put in hours of labor at the squad building and on calls, attend meetings, and do fund-raising chores as well.

The "blood and guts" part of the job, as Ruby puts it, is only part of the story. "There's all kinds of work that needs doing," she said, "like dispatching, mowing the lawn, maintaining the building, raising money."

Money and personnel are always in short supply, partly because required equipment is tremendously expensive. The new ambulance, equipped with just one stretcher, cost about \$43,000. A simple cervical collar, (and they use many) is \$17, filling an oxygen tank costs \$100, and every stretcher has a price tag of around \$1100.

There is no price tag on the commitment of EMT's. "There's not enough bodies to do the job," Ruby said, "but the same people offer over and over, and when we have a bad accident, I don't know where they come from, but they come."

Her squad is composed of 21 women and six men, about 70 percent of them transplants from outside the state.

They take calls over an area that reaches from the South Carolina line to north of Grissetown, and the edge of Longwood to the beach at Sunset Beach.

Victims of accidents or other emergencies are rushed to one of five hospitals, whichever is closest, including Brunswick, New Hanover and Cape Fear in Wilmington, Grand

Strand in Myrtle Beach, or Doshier in Southport.

With crucial needs arising over such a large area, Ruby said her pet peeve is "people expecting us to be a taxi . . . they don't know we're an emergency unit." Among their more frivolous calls was one from a man who'd run out of cigarettes, but they're often asked to transport people to appointments with their doctors.

When asked what it takes to be an EMT, Riedinger quickly answered, "Stupidity," and Ruby added, "And to be a chief . . . insanity!"

Specifically, the designation is earned through 165 hours of training,

12 hours in a hospital emergency room, and many hours of study. Prospective volunteers must be at least 18 years old, U.S. citizens, of good moral character, and have a doctor's certification of physical capability.

Despite their complaints and frustration, Ruby and Riedinger, like their colleagues, obviously feel deeply about the service they perform.

"When you see someone with cardiac arrest come around on the way to the hospital with your help, it's a great satisfaction," Ruby said.

"And the best thing about this," she added, "is the people I work with, the most compassionate, dedicated people in the world."



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