

COUNTDOWN TO ENHANCED 911 CONTINUES

## Doug Ledgett Patiently Turning Vision Into Reality

BY TERRY POPE

Responding to emergencies has been part of Doug Ledgett's job, or rather calling, for 20 years. He knows the importance of patience.

The Southport attorney set aside a law career to become Brunswick County's Emergency Medical Services supervisor in November 1990. Later, Brunswick County Commissioners gave him another title, assistant to the county manager.

With the county's enhanced 911 program scheduled to go on-line later this month, many of its components and supporting features reflect Ledgett's vision for the future—a county with paid emergency paramedics who work around the clock to help save lives.

"He was obviously the right person for the position," said County Manager David Clegg. "It's his first love. When he was hired, I just could not have been more pleased."

Ledgett had served on the Southport Volunteer Fire Department since 1971 and on the town's rescue squad since 1974. He was selected chairman of the Brunswick County Emergency Medical Services Advisory Council and has served on the advisory council for emergency services for the Region O Cape Fear Council of Governments as a planning agent for medical services.

"One reason I took the position," said Ledgett, "is it became evident that as long as we had an all-volunteer system we wouldn't improve on our response time or patient care. We needed to get higher than where we were. That's not to say that we weren't getting good care."

His corner office in the county administration building at the Brunswick County Government Center has been a busy spot for more than a year. But Ledgett isn't likely to take sole credit for bringing 911 closer to reality. Instead, he says, it was a countywide effort on the part of Emergency Management employees, volunteers in fire and rescue departments, county planners and others.

"He took programs that were in their infancy to where they are today," said Clegg. "He's a very quiet worker. He's gone about his duties and not made a lot of waves, but you can certainly move swiftly without making a lot of waves."

Part of those duties involves working 10 to 12 hours a day and taking Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) training classes at night. Half of his time is spent preparing for 911, selecting equipment and coordinating agencies involved in the detailed communications network. The other half is spent overseeing Emergency Medical Services.

Keeping long hours, he says, isn't a problem.



TESTING EQUIPMENT inside the county's 911 center is Atlantic Telephone employee Larry Hites. The program, not yet in operation, is scheduled to begin later this month. STAFF PHOTOS BY TERRY POPE



AFTER A LONG DAY at work, Doug Ledgett addresses Brunswick County Commissioners on details of the 911 program.

"I had been doing that as a volunteer, so it's nothing different," he said.

Patience and deliberateness under pressure have been his trademark. The 911 program has been hit with numerous delays as a result of late approval for building designs and delayed factory delivery of radio equipment. It was originally scheduled to begin Jan. 1.

The countdown to 911 continues. His enthusiasm for the program remains steady.

"It's going to be something that people can appreciate," said Ledgett. "It's going to save some lives."

Last month, Brunswick County's 12 paid EMT-Intermediates moved from basic life support to advanced life support certification, which allows them to start intravenous fluids, to monitor and to defibrillate patients in cardiac arrest to restore heart rhythm while enroute to the hospital. EMTs provide backup service to rescue volunteers, especially during days when volunteers must hold regular jobs.

Approximately 45 volunteers will finish EMT-Intermediate training this year. The goal is for the paid EMTs to finish paramedic training within two years. Paramedics work by radio with doctors to dispense medicine to patients on the scene or enroute to the hospital.

Ledgett practices what he preaches. He, too, will train to become a paramedic through the program offered at

Brunswick Community College, spending two or three nights per week for 18 months in a classroom after working days.

"By the time they're through, they will probably have about 1,400 hours of training," said Ledgett.

So far, there have been approximately 12 calls where advanced life support training has come in to play to help save lives in Brunswick County, said Ledgett. Often, EMTs will meet with squads which are enroute to the hospital with a patient. It requires cooperation among the departments.

"You don't see the squabbling that we once had between rescue squad chiefs," said Ledgett. "They meet once a month now. There is really good communication there."

It has been Ledgett's role as "grand facilitator" that ended the squabbling, said Clegg. Ledgett is a 20-year fire and rescue volunteer himself, and volunteers have grown to trust him across the county.

"He's a wonderful communicator," said Clegg. "He can explain things in a way that people understand. A lot of issues could have been more volatile had he not had that talent for being able to communicate well. He's been a tremendous asset to Brunswick County."

His goal is to push forward with emergency services. He will move his office this month into the Emergency

Operations Center that houses 911 and run the program from there. He will operate the growing Emergency Medical Services program and oversee the Geographic Information System, a database of maps and information on every parcel of land in Brunswick County, accessible through 911.

As the countdown moves closer to 911, it's been the smaller details of the program that have kept him busiest of late. But he's remained cool under pressure. Any system as detailed as 911 will involve minor setbacks, he said.

"That's to be expected in any system," said Ledgett. "Everything's got to fit together and will continue to grow."

When he accepted the job, Ledgett said he would view it as a challenge. A law practice served as a vocation to support his avocation and first love, emergency services. Law experience comes in handy now when dealing with issues of liability or with contractual matters.

"I'm rather ambitious in my plans," admits Ledgett. It's an ambition that has been good for Brunswick County and its citizens, said Clegg.

"We would not be at EMT-1 (Intermediate) status without him," said Clegg. "He's an authority figure to volunteers. They believe him. They trust him."

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