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Low membership strains county rescue squad

Perquimans County could neither function nor survive without the service of volunteers.

Town and county volunteer fire departments provide us with fire protection, and the Perquimans County Rescue Squad is our only means of emergency ambulance transportation.

The trouble is, though, that we have about volunteered some of these services to death. According to representatives of the county rescue squad, that service is presently feeling the strain of a rapidly dwindling membership, limited county representation, as well as service abuses involving patients whose need for emergency transportation is questionable.

Membership down drastically

Chartered in September of 1967, the rescue squad initially boasted a full membership of some 75 certified Emergency Medical Technicians. But mid-winter of 1981 has seen that membership drop to about 42 active EMTs, with an additional 5 members who serve in a back-up capacity.

"I guess some of the charisma of being a (rescue squad) member is wearing off," said squad captain Ralph Barr. "At first everyone wanted to be on the squad and wear their jackets around town, and that lasted with some until they started pulling duty in the wee hours of the morning," he said, adding, "It all comes down to dedication."

Squad treasurer John Beers attributed the shrinking membership to age. Many of the original members have retired, he said.

The fact that most active members are nearing retirement age could worsen the squad's low-membership problem, according to Beers, who scanned the rescue squad roster and noted that most of Perquimans County's EMTs were in their 50s, several were in their 60s, with very few classified as "young adults."

Whatever the reason for the deflated membership, the result is a strain on those who are often faced with pulling more than their regular duty each week.

"It's causing a problem because it's over-taxing those that are members of the squad," said Beers. He said that usually, duty consists of either one day (6 a.m. to 6 p.m.) a week, or one night (6 p.m. to 6 a.m.) about every three weeks.

But in light of the EMT shortage, he said that day-squad members have been pulling as many as three days a week duty.

"You can look can look and see the effect on the people who are called and called," said Barr, adding that the burden of pulling extra duty falls not only on rescue squad members, but on their families as well. "It's a burden on a family when one family-member is often not at home," he said.

Limited representation

Another problem facing the county rescue squad stems from the fact that approximately 32 of its 42 members live either in the town of Hertford, or within a two-mile radius.

"We want to stress that we have no representation in parts of the county and that we represent the whole county," said Beers.

Barr added that since the unit represents the county, he felt there should be more than 10 members from outside of Hertford on the squad.

Service is abused

Add the deflated membership to the fact that many calls received by the rescue squad are not necessarily "emergency" in nature, and that could spell trouble.

Barr recalled an incident in which he was called to transport a girl to the hospital who was suffering from nothing more than the flu. While en route, another call was received at the squad hut, and the night crew was called into duty.

"The service is being abused now," said Beers, "it really makes you mad when you drive up and see about three cars in the yard. These people could often go in their own private vehicles — and it's causing a shortage for those that really do need the emergency service."

Beers added that sometimes patients request a ride to Norfolk when they could receive the same care at either Chowan or Albemarle Hospital.

"The law says that once you pass the first hospital, then it ceases to be an emergency if the hospital can provide the care," said Beers.

Although the rescue squad does not, and cannot by law, require payment for services rendered, Beers said that the squad did encourage donations. "If we're asked to drive to Norfolk, we would like at least a \$75 donation," said Beers, adding that they encouraged donations of about \$150 for runs to the Chapel-Hill Durham area.

"But we will never refuse anyone transportation — if they can't afford a

donation, then a 'thank-you' is enough," said Beers.

Rescue squad requirements

Qualification as an EMT requires the completion of a 109-hour course and passing a state exam. Barr said that those who have completed the EMT class but who have not passed the exam are qualified as ambulance drivers.

Marjorie Nixon, who is a training officer with the Perquimans County Rescue Squad, and Albemarle Regional Planning and Development Commission's CPR coordinator for the 10-county region, said that although there is presently an EMT class in session in the county, another one could be initiated if enough interest is generated.

She said that so far, there had only been enough interest expressed to hold one EMT class in the county a year.

Of the some 7 or 8 people presently enrolled in the EMT class, Mrs. Nixon estimated that only about half would join forces with the county rescue squad.

Requirements for qualification as an ambulance driver are not as stringent, according to Mrs. Nixon, who said that completion of a 40-hour course meant certification.

Although a driver course is not presently offered in the county, Mrs. Nixon said "If we can get enough people together for a driver's course, I can get one started."

She said that the course consisted mainly of basic first-aid and CPR.

Warm bodies needed

The rescue squad could do with some warm bodies, and not necessarily the sick kind, according to Barr. Although he conceded that material rewards gained from volunteering time on the rescue squad were limited or nil, he said that self-satisfaction was the motivating factor for many.

"A guy doesn't get anything but a pat on the back, a thank-you and an occasional free meal, but there's a lot of satisfaction involved," said Barr.

"It gives you a good feeling to know you've helped to save somebody's life," he added.

"The rescue squad is my second love — I guess I'd better say that my wife is my first," joked Barr.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Those interested in taking either an EMT or ambulance driver class should contact Margie Nixon at ARPDC in Hertford, phone 426-5753.



Getting started

County officials, representatives of Rivers and Associates, the county engineering firm, and FmHA officials met Friday morning in the beginning

stages of a \$1,275,000 expansion of the county water system. Pictured are: (left to right) Ron Sessoms of Rivers and Associates, county finance officer D.F.

Reed, Jr., county commission chairman Joe Nowell, and FmHA officer Joyce Rhodes.

Wanted—water sign-ups

The preliminary stages of efforts to expand Perquimans County's water system got underway last week, after an announcement by first district congressman Walter B. Jones that a funding package had been approved.

That package includes a \$230,425 state clean water bond grant, a Farmers Home Administration grant of \$560,000, an FmHA loan of \$480,000, and a county match of \$4,575, for a total of \$1,275,000.

County officials met on Friday morning with FmHA officials and representatives of Rivers and Associates, the county engineering firm, in a session that was expected to have ended in the signing of a letter of conditions by county commission chairman Joe Nowell.

County attorney John Matthews, however, expressed the opinion that the letter couldn't be signed without the presence of the entire board, and the signing was postponed.

From there, the session became largely informational, centering on the steps required in getting the project underway.

Ron Sessoms, a Rivers and Associates engineer, established July 1 as the target date for having project specifications

ready to be put out for bidding.

If bidding proceeds in ideal fashion, construction on three wells, an additional treatment plant, and water lines could begin as early as this fall, said Wayne Floyd, another Rivers representative.

A release from Congressman Jones' office states that the expansion should allow the system to add 246 additional families. Floyd, however, said that figure was too high.

He said that Phase II was designed partly to serve those county residents who had signed up to be included in the project originally, but had to be excluded because of the cost feasibility of serving them.

At present, some 90 persons have signed up for county water and have not received it. Floyd said the expansion has the potential of serving some 120 households.

He urged those persons who have not signed up and want county water to do so. A \$10 fee is required for signing up in advance, but after a yet-to-be-established cut-off date, when plans for the expansion have been finalized, there will be a \$225 charge for hooking on to the water lines.

Those persons who live on a state road

not presently being served by county water have a good chance of being included in the expansion if they sign up in advance, Floyd said. "Just about everybody living on a state road who has signed up at present will be picked up," said Floyd.

There are, however, roads with houses that could potentially be served on which no one has signed up.

Service will be prioritized according to the number of signups and potential customers on a given road, said Floyd.

Besides offering county water to more customers, the expansion is expected to improve pressure in some of the higher parts of the county, and improve the quality of the water, Floyd said.

The water department has been plagued with reports of iron laden water and Floyd attributed that problem to a water plant working beyond its capacity.

Nowell was enthusiastic over the progress the system is making towards serving more county residents in an area where water is either treated or of poor quality.

"It might also be an enticement (to lure) industry in here," said Nowell.

VFD needs full-timer

The town of Hertford needs to consider hiring a full-time fireman to coordinate services that are becoming increasingly more demanding on volunteers, according to Hertford Volunteer Fire Chief Charlie Skinner, who appeared before the town council last week to present the department's annual report.

"When you look into next year's budget, I would like for the council to give some consideration to hiring a full-time fireman to serve in a multi-service capacity," said Skinner.

A full-time fireman could manage the station, and make the necessary fire prevention inspections that volunteers often do not have time for, he said.

Among other considerations the town needs to look into, according to Skinner, is the need to update fire prevention ordinances.

Describing present ordinances as "ancient history," he told the council that many existing codes date back to the 1960s.

"And there are many buildings in this town that don't meet current fire safety codes," he added.

Skinner also suggested that all future requests for burning permits within the town of Hertford be channeled through the town office, citing instances in which residents have called him at work about the matter.

"Volunteers shouldn't be obligated to issue these permits because we do not have the time," said Skinner.

The fire department has found several areas in town to contain structures that are hazardous, according to Skinner, who cited the 300 block of Market Street from the Madre house west to the Little S&R.

"This is a dangerous area — several of these structures are fire hazards," said Skinner, adding that there were also businesses within the town of Hertford that were dangerous because of the amount of trash and debris surrounding the premises.

He suggested that the council take action to condemn the dangerous structures, and pass an ordinance requiring that businesses keep flammable items and trash to a minimum.

Skinner told the council that although volunteer maintenance on vehicles and equipment had kept operating costs low, the department was in need of some new items, namely two new air packs at a cost of some \$850 each, as well as a "crew-type" transport vehicle (which he estimated at some \$12,000) "to cut down on so much individual driving."

Skinner estimated the cost of outfitting a volunteer fireman at some \$200.

The town council allotted the fire department an annual budget of \$16,350 for fiscal year 1980-81. Skinner said that the fire department had spent \$5,000 of the amount to date.

"I think that it takes the least amount of money to maintain the fire station than any other department in town," said Skinner.

Reporting on the fire department's activities during the year, Skinner enumerated several surveys taken by the volunteers.

He said that the fire department had established "pre-planned fire information on any given building in town," and had also taken a street-by-street survey of dwellings containing handicapped residents.

The Hertford Volunteer Fire Department answered a total of 61 calls during 1980 — 36 in Hertford, 24 in Perquimans County, and 1 in Elizabeth City.

There are presently 24 members of the fire department, with one application pending.

Skinner said that the department's goals for 1981 were "to make it (the department) the best it could possibly be," and "to train each man to his utmost for his own personal protection as well as his fellow firemen."



Damaged, but...

Chevrolet at about 9 a.m. last Thursday. After the fire the 1978 Thunderbird could

probably have been had at a very reasonable price.

Industrial development commission re-established

The Perquimans County Industrial Commission has been reorganized after a two year lull in activity and the group has already held its first meeting.

New members were appointed at last Monday's county commissioners' meeting and a meeting was scheduled for

the following Monday, Feb. 9.

"The purpose of this meeting is to reorganize and revitalize the industrial development commission," said county commission chairman Joe Nowell in opening the meeting. "Right many people feel the need for this commission

to get active again and try and entice some industry to come and take a good look at us," said Nowell.

Nowell stressed the need to sell and the need for selectivity in his remarks.

The first item of business for the new commission was the election of officers.

"We need somebody whose got the time and is willing to go," said Nowell of the chairmanship. "I don't think anybody's going to come if we don't go looking for them," he said.

Joel Hollowell, Jr. was elected to chair the commission by acclamation. The

vice-chair went to commissioner Charles H. Ward. Wayne Ashley of Bank of North Carolina was appointed treasurer and Hertford mayor Bill Cox was named secretary.

In discussion on the finances available to the commission, Cox said that the

county has some \$8,000 in savings.

The county has the authority to levy a five cents per \$100 valuation tax for industrial development but Nowell said that only a half a cent had been levied in recent years.

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