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## MEDINA: COVA is there when needed most

By Nicole Coleman/colemann@gnewspringer.com  
The Journal-Register

At the Central Orleans Volunteer Ambulance, saving lives is all in a day's work. In a medical emergency, they are on the scene within minutes, prepared to face whatever comes their way. Some calls are routine; others challenge not only their training, but their emotional stamina.

It's one of those jobs that requires a special kind of person. The pay is less than great, the hours are unpredictable and the pressure to deliver is high.

But who else can say they've stared death in the face — and won?

"To be in this line of work, you have to be selfless," said COVA Administrator and Emergency Medical Technician Sue Behrend. "There is a need for us to step up and do this — and not everybody can do it."

The EMTs and paramedics at COVA provide round-the-clock emergency medical care for their neighbors in Gaines, Barre, Carlton and Albion, responding to more than 2,000 calls per year. Patients are transported to Medina Memorial Health Care System or the trauma center at Strong Memorial Hospital in Rochester.

They are funded solely through service calls and donations. Starting pay for an EMT basic is \$8.56. EMT intermediates start at \$8.81 and paramedics start at \$13.35.




For most, it is a side job as a service to their community.

Director of Operations Guy Scribner volunteers his time at COVA on top of full-time jobs as an EMT at Rural Metro and as a security guard at Medina Hospital. He also is a volunteer with the Ridgeway Fire Department and has a 3-year-old adopted son.

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Behrend's job is part-time, but, more often than not, she works much more than 40 hours a week. Like a mother hen, she takes the extra time to make sure everything is done correctly.

Her daughters, Vangie Behrend and Melissa Scheidt, regularly volunteer their time as EMT basics. Her husband, Norman, has worked and volunteered as an EMT for more than 30 years and is COVA's training coordinator.

Scribner and the Behrend family are not unique. Many at COVA have volunteered their time at one point or another. Take, for instance, EMT Eric Bradshaw, also the Albion Fire Department chief. Or husband-and-wife teams Terry and Jerry Bentley, Jocelyn and Tom Yockel and Venturer leaders Pat and Barb Lamka.

"Everybody is giving 110 percent," Behrend said. "Everybody who works and volunteers here has COVA at their best interest. ... When we have a problem, we solve it together."

The business of saving lives is not risk-free, however, she said. Every call does not unfold in a picture-perfect way.

It could be as simple as trying to insert an IV when the driver hits a bump in the road, exposing the technician to any number of blood diseases: AIDS, hepatitis or tuberculosis.

In other situations, the patient may need to be pulled from the wreckage of a motor vehicle accident. Once, an EMT had to climb down a steep embankment to reach a patient.

Critical incidents require a stress debriefing to help the team cope, Behrend said.

Dean Brooks, a paramedic from Batavia who works full-time at Twin City Ambulance in Buffalo and part-time at COVA, said the job requires great trust among co-workers — especially after the adrenaline rush fades.

"If you don't have a good sense of humor, you won't survive," Brooks said.

Formerly the assistant administrator, Behrend took over as administrator in August. Her immediate goals are to purchase a new \$100,000 ambulance to replace an older model sold over the summer. She also hopes to increase the wage scale, making COVA more competitive.

A higher salary would attract much-needed paramedics who are certified to administer narcotics. In the event of a serious accident, there should be one paramedic on a three-person crew at all times, she said.

For now, COVA will hold its annual banquet Dec. 1 at the Carlton Recreation Hall, where they will swear in officers and honor those who have given above and beyond throughout the year.

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Contact reporter Nicole Coleman at 798-1400, ext. 2227.



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