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Chenango County's Hometown Daily

Fly car concept: Will it fly?

By: [Michael McGuire](#), Sun Staff Writer [READ MY BLOG](#)

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CHENANGO COUNTY – There is no easy answer to the county's ambulance shortage, one long-time volunteer firefighter and emergency medical technician says.



"It's going to take some creativity," said Glenn Degear, a 32-year volunteer with the Preston Fire Department. "But it's great that the county is looking at the situation and giving it attention."

Last Tuesday, in response to the announcement that Superior Ambulance – a private company that handled the bulk of emergency calls in a number of rural townships – would no longer be serving Chenango County after Oct. 25, county Fire Coordinator Matt Beckwith suggested the Board of Supervisors consider implementing a "fly car" system that would add manpower to struggling volunteer emergency medical squads.

"This is a very good starting block toward solving the EMS crisis," Beckwith said. "There are a lot of logistics left to be worked out. But the question is: Right now, how do we provide the best possible care for the people who are hurt out there in their homes or lying in the street? Right now, this is the best it's going to get."

The fly car


Under Beckwith's plan, three county-employed paramedics would drive two "fly cars" – sport utility vehicles – to emergency calls throughout the county and staff volunteer ambulances on


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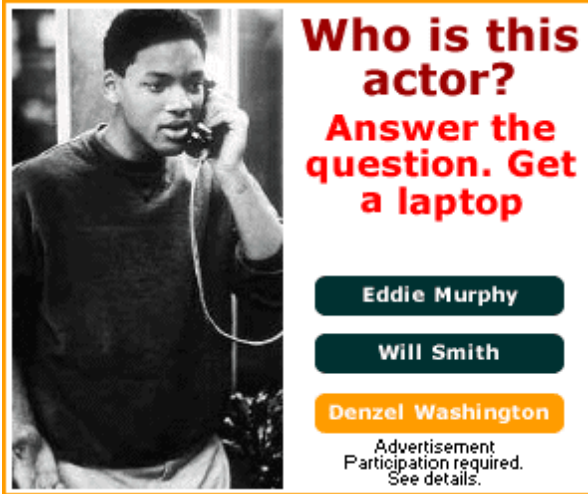
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The fly cars would run 60 hours a week from two strategic posts in the northern and southern halves of the county. The program is estimated to cost \$273,160 annually.

The plan would supplement and re-activate several local EMS squads that are struggling, Beckwith said, because the shortage isn't necessarily due to a lack of ambulances or drivers, but a lack of state-certified volunteer paramedics to work on patients in the rigs departments already have.



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“That’s where we have our greatest need,” he said Tuesday.

Instead of not taking calls for a lack of EMTs, departments, like the one in McDonough, would be able to put their ambulances back in-service using their own drivers and county paramedics.

“For the majority of calls we have during the week, we can find volunteers to drive the ambulances,” Beckwith said. “Finding drivers isn’t the problem. It’s the paramedics that’s hard.”

If approved, the specifics of the fly car plan as proposed may change. But Beckwith expects it

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will be the long-term county solution.

“If the board accepts it, I don’t expect this to be gone in six months to a year,” he said. “We will continually re-evaluate it as we go. But if we’re serving the need, then we’re serving the need. That’s what matters most.”

From Degear’s perspective, it’s going to take more than a fly car to solve the ambulance problem.

“It’s a step in the right direction,” Degear said. “I’m not sure fly cars alone will replace the loss of three ambulances. It will probably take a few different solutions.”

He believes it will likely take another private service to come in, or a combination of private and county-funded services, to ultimately solve the problem and supplement.

Beckwith says he is continuing talks with private ambulance providers to handle mental health and hospital-to-hospital transports between Binghamton and Norwich, but claims it’s unlikely another company will take Superior’s place full time.

“There just simply isn’t the call volume here to make it profitable,” he said. “Superior couldn’t make money here. Other companies looked at coming in, but decided it wouldn’t be the right move. As far as the county running full-time ambulances, if no one else will come here because they can’t make money, what makes people think it’s economical for the county?”

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issylu

October 15th, 2007 at 11:24 am

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