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## In emergencies, seconds count

Ambulance squad urges drivers to give right of way

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The call from Dispatch 911 comes in over the Broome Volunteer Emergency Squad's radio frequency: 80-year-old female fallen, head injury.

Bravo priority.

Deanne Hayko jumps into the driver's seat, while fellow Emergency Medical Tech Amber Depue climbs into the back of the ambulance. Advanced EMT/Critical Care Ed Knudsen waves them out of the garage, slams the bay doors and darts into the back himself.

And they're off, siren blaring and lights flashing.

They're barely out of the driveway of the Court Street station when they encounter their first traffic obstacle. A driver in a beat-up pick-up truck can't decide if he should let the ambulance pull in front of him, or if he should race it onto the next stretch of the Brandywine.

He stops.

The emergency response proceeds.



**Valerie Zehl**  
**Neighbors**

Posted Sunday September 30, 2007

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VALERIE ZEHL / Press & Sun-Bulletin

Ed Knudsen and Deanne Hayko are on staff at the Broome Volunteer Emergency Squad. Their efforts are supplemented by skilled but unpaid emergency response providers.

Twenty seconds lost.

Seconds count when lives hang in the balance.

It already feels to the patient as though it takes an hour for an ambulance to answer their distress call, Hayko says. Then you get drivers like that who have no clue -- their incompetence stalls the response further.

Carla Simpson is an incorporating member of the squad, which began 31 years ago. She's president and chair of the volunteer board, and an Advanced EMT/Critical Care, too.

She remembers one hairy incident wherein the responders almost needed an ambulance themselves.

"We were going up Route 12 where it's very narrow, up Kattelville Hill toward Chenango Forks. The driver in front of us, instead of pulling over, stopped in the middle of the road," she says. "We fishtailed into oncoming traffic."

Had the other driver simply followed the law by moving to the far right of the road and stopping, the ambulance could have proceeded safely and swiftly.

"I was lucky I had a good driver and we weren't following too closely," she says.

It's also fortunate the roads were dry and the patient wasn't in the vehicle yet. A swerve like that sends equipment and personnel flying around the back of the ambulance.

They all have stories like that to tell.

"That's the most dangerous part of the job," says Hayko. "If I have to put those brakes on, I'm endangering my life, Ed's life, the patient's life."

Often Knudsen is in the back, focused entirely on the patient and oblivious to any traffic situations that crop up. He may at any point have a needle in his hand and be poised to establish an intravenous line. If the ambulance has to brake hard or swerve --

The job is already hard enough.

"Ever try to (stabilize) a broken leg going 70 miles per hour?" Hayko asks. Ambulance personnel do much of what's done in an ER, but in a van, and often at highway speeds.

They wish other drivers would keep in mind that lights and sirens mean a serious situation with an unstable patient, and drivers are required -- both by law and by their humanity -- to move as far to the right as possible, and stop.

"It could be a member of their family that's in the ambulance," Knudsen says.



The squad, which has stations in Binghamton and Chenango Bridge, answers some 4,000 calls a year. It's a hybrid crew, made up of eight full-time and 41 part-time employees and 12 volunteers.

They're always looking for more.

The number of calls they answer ranges from none to 10 a night.

Now they're missing their No. 1, teammate: Executive director Steve Brown, who needed rescue himself when he became entangled in a brush hog.

The squad members have varying degrees of certification, reflecting varying degrees of expertise and knowledge.

Ralph Fuller is a paramedic, the highest level of pre-hospital personnel.

But the EMTs are the backbone of the system, he explains. "They do a good assessment, and without that foundation we'd have nothing to do."

The calls come ranked by severity: Alpha is the sprained-ankle kind of injury. In answering an Alpha, the ambulance doesn't use a siren and obeys every possible traffic signal.


The siren goes on for a Bravo call, which is more serious but still not life-threatening.

In a Charlie call, the patient is potentially unstable, such as during respiratory distress.

Delta means an urgent situation, maybe a patient actively seizing or experiencing severe chest pain.

Echo is reserved for the life-or-death emergencies -- when it's not just seconds, but split-seconds that matter.

"I can't stress it enough," Hayko says. "When that emergency vehicle goes by, (other drivers) have to respect it."

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Excellent job! You shouldn't be going 70 mph for any call.

Posted by: **fish** on Sun Sep 30, 2007 8:07 am

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