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Duanesburg ambulance corps battles membership woes

By Justin Mason (Contact)
Gazette Reporter

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DUANESBURG A shortage of members for the Duanesburg Volunteer Ambulance Corps is leading to longer response times and often the need for neighboring ambulance companies to cover local calls.

As of last month, Duanesburg was down to about a dozen active members to serve as EMTs and drivers for the 25-year-old, nonprofit ambulance crew, which annually responds to more than 600 emergencies along the western edge of Schenectady County.

Leadership turnover and a lack of volunteers has caused serious problems for response times, according to Bill VanHoesen, the county's emergency management director

"They've had a problem with response times that has extended for a period of time," he said.

The lack of personnel has also resulted in dozens of mutual aid responses from ambulance services in Rotterdam and Schenectady this year.

"So far this year, we've missed like 30 calls or so already," said Nick Ragucci, a volunteer emergency medical technician. "It's definitely a problem for the community."

The ambulance company's Board of Directors called a special meeting this week and made an appeal for help to four surrounding volunteer fire departments.

"We've got to find out what all our options are right now," said Mary Grimm, the group's treasurer. "And, in the meantime, we've got to get our Duanesburg Volunteer Ambulance Company in line."

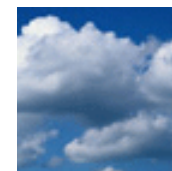
Grimm said finding volunteers for the ambulance company has grown progressively difficult over the past few years. She said the lack of new recruits is compounded by the company's aging membership. Some of them can no longer physically serve on an ambulance crew.

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“Unfortunately, they become support members, which we also need, but they can’t go out to the calls,” she said.

The shortage of personnel has also caught the attention of the Duanesburg Town Board, which is in ongoing contract negotiations with the ambulance company. Supervisor Rene Merrihew said the town annually contributes about \$43,000, which is slightly less than a third of the organization’s overall funding.

“People need to volunteer and step up to the plate,” said Merrihew, who is a member of the ambulance company’s support staff. “All the money in the world is not going to go out and get more volunteers.”

Anyone interested in volunteering can contact Grimm at 895-2330 or fellow board member Amy Jo Simpson at 875-6209.



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