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# Canandaigua: Emergency service transferred

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**By Julie Sherwood, staff writer**  
**Daily Messenger**

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Canandaigua, N.Y. — With more ambulance squads staffing or equipping their rigs with advanced-life support, Thompson Health has decided to transfer its long-standing advanced-life support service to the Canandaigua Emergency Squad.

Thompson launched Ontario County Advanced Life Support in the 1980s to help local ambulance companies, which at the time provided transport and only basic emergency care. OCALS staff man “fly cars,” the specially-equipped vehicles that meet up with ambulances to provide higher levels of care than emergency medical technicians can provide.

But in recent years, ambulance companies have begun charging insurance companies for transport and hiring paramedics, especially for daytime shifts when volunteers are not available.

This has reduced the need for the specialized service provided by OCALS.

Now, Thompson will arrange for the Canandaigua Emergency Squad to assume coverage for any areas that OCALS covers now. Currently, OCALS serves Bristol, Honeoye, Naples and most of South Bristol. This entails getting state approval to transfer a document, called a certificate of need, to the squad.

The transfer is expected to take place late this summer.

In addition, Thompson will offer support services and start-up supplies to the Richmond Fire Department in its quest to upgrade its ambulance squad to advanced life support service.

Thompson will also provide staffing services to squads that need assistance with manpower, as well as offer emergency-preparedness training and quality assurance services.

Linda Janczak, Thompson president and chief executive officer, stated in a press release “no positions are expected to be eliminated as a result” of the transition. Thompson currently has 4 full-time emergency service personnel and they will continue to be Thompson employees. They will continue to provide training or support to local ambulance services.

Bonnie Ross, Thompson’s senior vice president of strategic planning, said the number of OCALS personnel Thompson had been providing for the fly cars has dwindled. A number of years ago, at peak, personnel went out about 25 times a week. Now, it averages about four times a week, she said.

“We have sustained (financial) losses over the years,” she said. Thompson’s Board of Directors, which made the unanimous decision May 29 to transition OCALS to the Canandaigua Emergency Squad, made a sound decision to meet the needs of the community, she said.

OCALS was founded in 1983 as a volunteer-based organization with Dr. Benjamin Lankheet — then the head of Thompson’s emergency department — serving as medical director. The agency originally provided service from 4 p.m. until midnight, with a

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used station wagon donated by a local auto dealer as a "fly car." The fly car would be dispatched to meet up with a volunteer squad, and the OCALS paramedic would ride along as the squad transported the patient to the hospital.

In 1995, OCALS became a corporation of Thompson and began providing 24/7 advanced life support coverage. Over the years, as volunteer ambulance squads began to move from a basic life support service to advanced service, the need for fly car service declined and OCALS began to provide staffing, on a contract basis.

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