



## Nyack Ambulance Corps still answering calls 70 years later

NYACK — In 1939, eight recent graduates of Nyack High School pooled \$200 and founded what would become the Nyack Community Ambulance Corps.

Their first rescue vehicle was a secondhand Franklin truck purchased for \$50.

But what the volunteer corps might have lacked in equipment, it made up for in longevity.

More than 70 years later, about 40 members of the ambulance corps gathered with family and friends Sunday at the Marydell Faith and Life Center in Upper Nyack for the ambulance corps' annual picnic.

"I don't think anyone back then could have thought we would still be in operation," said William McDowell, president of the ambulance corps.

"And yet, here we are anchored to the community," he said.

McDowell said Nyack, which is the second-oldest ambulance corps in Rockland County, answers about 1,600 calls a year.

Also at the picnic to present a commemorative plaque celebrating the ambulance corps' history were Jane Russell and Louise Bohr, whose husbands, Edward Russell and Roderick Bohr, were two of the eight founders.

Both men died in the late 1980s.

Seated at a picnic table and surrounded by family, Bohr, 91, and Russell, 87, spoke about the early days of the ambulance corps, back when Rockland was still rural and navigating the roads at high speeds took a fair amount of pluck.

"To save money on gas, they used to put the truck in neutral when they were driving downhill on 9W," Russell said with a laugh. "They went by instinct."

Bohr said the basic plan to start the ambulance corps was hatched on the front steps of the

Rockland County YMCA after one of the mothers of the Nyack High School graduates had been billed for a trip in a hospital ambulance.

Shocked by the cost, they decided to start their own, Bohr said.

Several ambulance members at the picnic said they were proud of the corps' colorful past — and were committed to answering its future calls.

Thomas Neff, 73, said he decided to join Nyack ambulance more than a decade ago after retiring from his job as a New York City police officer.

"You got to give back," he said. "That's all."

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Jane Russell, left, and Louise Bohr hold a plaque with Jeremy Griffel, 23, of Valley Cottage that celebrates the history of the Nyack Ambulance Corps at the corps' annual picnic at Marydell Faith and Life Center in Upper Nyack. Russell's and Bohr's husbands, now deceased, were two of the eight founders of the corps. Griffel is an ambulance corps captain. (Alex Taylor/The Journal News)

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