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Community News



A New Risk to Public Safety?

by Harold Egelin (edit@brooklyneagle.net), published online 02-02-2010

Volunteer Ambulance Corps Dumped From 911 System

By Harold Egelin
Brooklyn Daily Eagle

BAY RIDGE -- BRAVO, the Bay Ridge Ambulance Volunteer Organization that has helped thousands of injured and sick people since 1974, is, in effect, being "dissed," according to its leaders and supporters.

The city has decided, as a cost-saving measure in this severe recession, to remove BRAVO and 34 other volunteer ambulance services throughout Brooklyn and the city from its 911 emergency response call-in system.

In addition, there is another problem. When the Fire Department is unable to send out its ambulances for emergencies, the FDNY would call volunteer ambulance services. The city has decided to stop this practice as well.

It is feared that the "downgrading" of volunteer services, such as BRAVO in Bay Ridge, may threaten the availability and future of the service, which works out its headquarters on Seventh Avenue and 85th Street, according to BRAVO President Drew Kasler, who said he was outraged by the decision.

What upset him the most was the fact that Mayor Bloomberg, along with other top officials, has championed volunteerism repeatedly in television and radio commercials and media reports. Working together with the FDNY and the city would serve the city's residents in the best way, Kasler said.

Weiner Blasts City Decision as 'Dangerous'

"The city's decision to cut 35 vital community-run ambulance companies from the city's 911 emergency response system will put thousands of New Yorkers' lives in jeopardy," said Congressman Anthony Weiner in a press release blasting the city's move.

"Last year alone, volunteer ambulance companies were called to respond to nearly 15,000 emergencies. This is a service New Yorkers can't afford to lose," Weiner said. "Volunteer ambulance companies were some of the first responders on 9/11 and to the crash site of American Airlines Flight 587."

Residents of Bay Ridge remember how BRAVO quickly responded to the January 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center and the much more deadly terrorist attack destroying the twin towers on Sept. 11, 2001, Kasler noted.

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BRAVO's service is essential to the health and public safety of the residents and working people of Bay Ridge and Dyker Heights, says Kasler. He and BRAVO's supporters noted that when it was founded in 1974, people often waited more than half an hour for an ambulance to arrive.

BRAVO remains in action and appreciates community support and funding, including from local elected officials, it was noted. This emergency service is available by calling BRAVO at (718) 680-1111.

That number is posted or pasted all over greater Bay Ridge phones in homes, businesses, shops and restaurants, and has been called countless times over the past 36 years. For many it is a lifeline, easily memorized and remembered by thousands who have relied on it or who have been ready to use it, just in case.

"I understand the need to cut costs in a tough fiscal climate. But the city needs to find other ways to save money," said Weiner.

BRAVO was founded by civic leader Hank Vogt, with others such as Joe Keeler, a former Community Board 10 chair, and Larry Morrish, who got the name from watching the John Wayne movie Rio Bravo on TV. Vogt died in 2007.

The corner of BRAVO's headquarters at 8507 Seventh Ave., at the Bay Ridge-Dyker Heights neighborhood line, will be officially dedicated as "Hank Vogt Way" in a few months. Mayor Bloomberg signed the bill, sponsored by Councilman Vincent Gentile.

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