



# SENECA COUNTY Emergency Medical Services



Seneca County EMS celebrated its 35 year anniversary in 2013.

Our historic past has not been without considerable struggle and many leadership changes along the way. The county and township elected officials have changed office many times over the past 35 years, and it was very important to identify who the stakeholders are in the leadership structure prior to introducing any new funding options that will take us into the future.

The introductory process utilizing the EMS Volunteer Recognition program has went well, with some of the townships showing little or no interest in the EMS operation component of our extremely important program. The lines of communication have been opened to the township elected officials and the county commissioners attended all of the recognition events and were introduced and addressed each board in kind. Very few "real" questions were asked, and weren't expected to be as this venue was intended to be an introductory means of opening the lines of communication.

The crux of our problem here is the dwindling manpower of volunteer EMS. Lack of personnel during the day was partially solved with the addition of the Echo Paramedic unit in the fall of 2008. This had a positive impact on our response times, level of care provided during the initial response, and also provided a command component early in the incident. What it did not do was provide more manpower at the local level, and none of our recruiting efforts utilizing the Echo unit as an example of where County EMS could lead have proven very effective. Although that idea was meant to be a long term goal and might still meet with moderate success over the next few years. We have recruited some very dedicated, goal orient volunteers in the past 5 years. Just not enough to really make an impact county wide.

Our significant manpower struggles continue to be in the Northern portion of our response area. Our squad in Green Springs is out of service due to lack of manpower more than 50% of the time. Most weeks it is closer to 75%. All the documentation is available to review regarding in service/out of service time.

Green Springs is (or could be) one of our busiest transporting ambulances, and historically always has been. There is a real possibility that they could be called more than 300 times per year if they were in service to receive those calls.

300 ambulance calls per year equates to approximately \$100,000 in revenue to the county, using standard medicare reimbursement rates as an estimate.

Due to the inordinate amount of out of service time cataloged by Green Springs Squad, we lose most of this revenue to our neighbor to the north, Sandusky County EMS. They have an ambulance stationed in Clyde and it responds to the Village of Green Springs when our ambulance is out of service due to lack of manning. Republic Squad responds to cover Adams township and points south of Green Springs when the Green Springs squad is out of service.

The amount of calls received in this area during the time they are out of service costs us a lot in real dollars and even more in the lack of willingness of neighboring squad districts to want to pick up this "slack". The volunteers in Republic are growing exceedingly weary of covering a district that was never intended to be covered by their squad. So the cost of an out of service ambulance costs a lot more than dollars.

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Bettsville Squad and Attica Squad are also out of service approximately 50% of the time.

The neighboring squads in these areas are Bascom and Bloomville.

Bascom has no problem covering the areas left uncovered by Bettsville because they use a "Compensated Volunteer" model to pay their EMS volunteers.

Bascom has proven over the past year that they have no problem staffing two ambulances at any given time.

The Compensated Volunteer model that they utilize is essentially an hourly on-call wage of approximately \$3/hr. They call it a "nominal fee" which is defined by the Department of Labor as:

### *Volunteers Paid Nominal Fees*

*On November 10, 2005, the DOL issued an opinion letter addressing what constitutes a "nominal fee" that may be paid to a volunteer under the FLSA. The DOL clarified that a "nominal fee" is not a substitute for compensation and must not be tied to productivity. Whether a fee constitutes a substitute for compensation or whether it is tied to productivity depends on the "economic realities of the particular situation." In the context of a school coach or school advisor, the key factor is whether the fee varies depending on the time spent engaged in the volunteer activity or the success or failure of the team or activity. If the fee is not tied to time or the success of the activity, the fee would generally not be considered a substitute for compensation or tied to productivity. The DOL provided an economic realities test stating that a fee would be presumed nominal if it did not exceed 20 percent of what the public agency would otherwise pay to hire someone to provide the same services. Applying these factors to a school custodian acting as a volunteer sports coach, the DOL stated that as long as the custodian agreed to volunteer, without pressure or coercion from the school, a \$3,675 fee would be considered nominal if it did not exceed 20 percent of what the school would otherwise pay to hire a coach for the same activity*

Bascom has had some real success using the nominal fee to recruit, retain, and motivate the volunteers into completing a schedule, and even have several EMS volunteers that commit to several shifts per week.

This model is worth discussing at the township level county wide. It has proven to be successful in the Bascom/Hopewell/Loudon area of the county.

The benefit of it has provided a pool of EMTs in the Bascom area that has grown to almost 30 volunteers.

The facts are that all of our squads (except Bascom) have a real issue recruiting, retaining, and maintaining a volunteer force. The reasons for this are varied but mostly come down to an issue of funding.

There is a huge time commitment that the education and training requires and the maintenance of that education and training is also a huge time commitment.

My agenda as Director of EMS is primarily that of an Education coordinator due to the sheer amount of preparation, planning, organizing, and teaching requires. Essentially my job title should be Adult Education Coordinator for Emergency Medical Services.

The only solution to the decreasing EMS volunteer manpower question can be Funding.

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The leadership of Seneca County EMS, including the County Commissioners, and Township Elected officials need to discuss and formalize a plan to Compensate our Volunteers sufficiently that it becomes beneficial to them to be a part of our system.

My idea for this would be a Levy at the local level that would afford the townships to pay for a 2 Person crew 24 hours per day.

The local EMS crew would be at the BLS level – 2 Basic EMTs scheduled 24 hours per day. Continued financial support from Seneca County to maintain the Seneca County Echo Paramedic Response would be important to maintain our standard of care to the minimum standard and increasing the Echo unit to a 24 hour a day unit would be beneficial.

The “Nominal Fee” paid to compensate the volunteers should be paid at the local government level. If the county tried to take on this project it may cause problems down the road with “insurability” under the new healthcare reform. If these volunteers were ever considered to be “employees” of the county it could be detrimental from a “providing insurance/benefits” perspective.

The districts will need to meet and discuss this possibility because the financial burden should not be placed on any one twp or village.

The districts are as follows:

Venice & Reed Townships and the Village of Attica

Bloom Township & the Village of Bloomville

Pleasant and Adams Township & Green Springs Village

Scipio Township and Republic

New Riegel, Seneca, and Big Springs Township

Bettsville and Liberty Township and Jackson Twp.

Hopewell/Loudon & Village of Bascom – Already in Place as Bascom Joint Ambulance District.

My plan to attack this problem is three-fold.

1: Awareness – we are working on that using the Recognition Event system and then follow on meetings after the first of the year. Initially contacting each district that is in imminent trouble with lack of manpower (Green Springs/Bettsville/Attica).

2: Planning – second quarter 2014 – meet with each twp & village and discuss this plan after the commissioners have discussed it and agreed it is viable option.

3: Implementation – each of the above twp/village entities will need to create their own plan to implement utilizing their solicitor and necessary resources to determine what amounts are needed to fund the plan.

This model of compensation would need to generate approximately \$60,000 per year to pay a 2 person crew/24 hours per day/365 days per year.

No overtime pay, no per run pay and no training pay is included in this calculation.

Six Squads (not counting Bascom) = \$360,000

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Might want to go grab a drink and a snack....cause I'm really getting started now.  
Take a few deep breaths....

A million dollar Ambulance service in Seneca County, Ohio??

This is completely 100% voluntary and is not required by Ohio Revised Code. Seven squad districts were placed where they are to minimize response times and serve the population centers of our county. This was done 30+ years ago when the legal aspect of running an ambulance service were quite a bit different than they are today. But the deployment and locations are still very valid and have proven the test of time that they are worth having where they are, in respect to response times, and lives saved.

In order to keep our 100% volunteer EMS service in the current locations, this would be the absolute minimum cost. \$500,000 in operations and equipment and another \$420,000 in personnel reimbursement costs. This is a shared expenditure with the County bearing most of the burden for equipment, supplies, training, education, ambulances, maintenance, and insurance. We can consider some alternative methods of providing EMS coverage.

The ideal model for EMS in a county of this size would be 4 ambulances strategically placed in the 4 corners of the map.  
Bettsville, Green Springs, Bloomville, and Bascom.  
We even have enough ambulances to put two in each location and man one, with one serving as a ready to go back –up ambulance, already deployed, if we need it. All we would need to do is call in personnel to have it ready.  
We could do this with the current amount of vehicles we own, and utilizing essentially the same infrastructure that we currently own and operate.

The killer of this plan, is cost. Payroll costs would be enormous.  
The only way to get the 4 squad model operational would be to pay the EMS workers.  
No volunteer will be willing to go away from home and man a station that is outside of their home district.  
We would have to pay them at least part-time wage & benefits in order to attract people to cover the 4 squad districts.  
The estimated cost of a full time, paid ambulance is \$300,000 each.  
Even a Basic Ambulance would cost close to this because the payroll of each would be approximately \$150,000 annually and that is using minimum wage (not including benefits, overtime, sick time, or vacation).

Volunteers want to volunteer in their community, and do not consider it a job to do that. Although they do expect compensation for their time spent pursuing the chance to serve their community, they will not volunteer to go away from home and spend time away from their family in another district for hours on end.

There are also many different alternative funding options that deserve discussion, including a reimbursement per call model, and we already do this (minimally), but perhaps an increase in this could be discussed.

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Currently, Seneca County EMS sets aside \$30,000 per year for "Run Allowances". We pay \$30 per run to each squad for every transport they make.

We usually have approximately 1,000 transports per year, so that makes the math on that equation pretty simple. Our busiest squad this year will be Bascom, with approximately 350 transports under their belt.

So we will pay them \$3500 and they can choose to split that money amongst the volunteers that went on each run equally, or they can spend it on squad activities (equipment, clothing, uniforms, furniture, computers, etc..). Some squads put that money towards training at outside events (seminars, conferences).

We could make the suggestion that the township & villages match the county reimbursement.

If the township and village could find the way to match our \$30 per run, and pay each of the required 2 EMTs per call \$30, perhaps that would increase participation.

Maybe we can get more people to show up for that amount of reimbursement?

As stated previously, we only reimburse for TRANSPORTS. Perhaps we should change that and reimburse \$30 per RESPONSE.

2 EMTs are needed to complete a crew and respond to each incident.

We pay \$30 for every run and ask the Townships and Villages to come together, and MATCH that funding.

The reason this may work, is because currently, we only pay for transports. We respond to approximately 1500 incidents every year. But only transport 1000 patients. So 500 runs a year, we respond, do all the things we ordinarily do, but don't transport, and therefore don't get reimbursed.

If we reimbursed for the time spent on those non transporting runs, perhaps we would gain a few people.

I do want to emphasize that only TRANSPORTS are billable. We do not make any money at all for responding but not transporting, so those runs would still cost us.

An approximate cost for this type of reimbursement model would be \$90,000 annually.

If we could find a way to have the Local Government match our effort, we would only need \$45,000.

Not all that far off from what we have allocated in this line already.

This is probably a good way to approach this problem.

Consider it another "Band-Aid on a bullet hole" approach.

These are a few ideas that should generate some discussion towards re-building our manpower deficit.

There are many ways to view this challenge.

Remember also that our neighbors to the north in Sandusky County utilize a 4 squad, all paramedic model, and they run Primary EMS in the city of Fremont (with no competition from the fire departments), and it costs them approximately 2.5 million dollars.

Here in Seneca County our population center is the City of Tiffin, with a full time paid Fire/EMS division that provides ambulance service for their residents and two neighboring townships. The City of Fostoria runs a similar program there. Each of those departments have budgets over \$2 million as well.

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