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Little Falls looks to convert volunteer EMS to paid service

BY MATTHEW KADOSH
Staff Writer

LITTLE FALLS - After years of struggling to keep the ranks of the local volunteer first aid squad up, and ambulance response times down, township officials are looking to institute a paid emergency medical service.

Eagle Rescue Squad, an approximately 15-member group that runs two ambulances out of the fire department's Company

1, receives about 1,500 requests for service yearly, and is suffering a staffing shortage, Fire Chief Jack Sweezy said on Oct. 15.

Although it has a handful of new recruits, the squad's membership has diminished over time because some of the volunteers have either moved out of town or transferred to other fire companies, Sweezy said.

In October 2011, the Township Council addressed by matter by adopting an ordinance to establish

a paid ambulance service from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.

"Our volunteers opposed this and worked diligently to ensure daytime coverage," said Mayor Darlene Post in a message on the town website this month. "A decision was made to hold off on moving forward. Unfortunately, we find ourselves once again faced with lengthy response times during daytime working hours."

Now, the chief is looking for a paid service during all hours.

"We noticed the demand is 24 hours a day, and its that much harder on volunteers," he said. "So we'd be looking to have a paid service 24 hours a day, seven days a week."

Sweezy said he hopes to improve the service for the sake of residents' safety.

"I'm looking to continue working with the town council to get this in place shortly," Sweezy said.

"It's a much needed service, and it's long overdue. Company 1 is a

very busy company."

Eagle Rescue Squad Capt. Thomas Jacobus described in the 2013 fire department report a thriving rescue squad, but one in need of more volunteers. "I am recommending that Eagle Rescue Squad continue to find new ways to recruit and retain new members, especially residents from within the Township of Little Falls," he wrote.

SEE AMBULANCE, PAGE 23

IT'S YO-JO!



STAFF PHOTOS BY DEMITRIUS BALEVSKI

Memorial School in Totowa received a return visit from "Yo-Jo," a lively, entertaining and educational character who conducts a school assembly program to spread the message of anti-bullying to students.

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Community

AMBULANCE

FROM PAGE 1

Jacobus further recommended that members from within the fire department's other companies consider joining the rescue squad in the form of ambulance drivers and by getting their EMT certifications. The year before that, the squad also recommended in its annual report to the chief that the department find ways to fill the need for volunteers during day-time hours.

This month, Post said she has both received letters and heard residents comments at public

meetings about lagging ambulance response times.

"Our residents deserve a quick and appropriate response when the need arises," she said. "We need to move forward with the creation of a paid ambulance service. We can't wait any longer."

The goal of the paid service as Sweezy sees it: "In three to five minutes, you would have an ambulance at your doorstep when requested."

The service would be funded by billing patients' insurance companies and there would be no out-of-pocket cost for township residents, he said.

Post said in an interview that

the town would bear an initial startup cost at the implementation of the paid service, but that investment would be returned over time. She had no specific timeline for its implementation.

Township resident Bob Dombrowski, a caretaker for his 90-year-old mother, has been lobbying the council for a speedier ambulance service since his mother had a stroke nearly five years ago and they waited about 22 minutes for a response, he said.

"I've been asking since April 2010," said Dombrowski, a frequent commenter at council meetings. "I know there was a plan in place and the previous mayor had supported it."

He said he has heard from other residents reporting ambulance response times of up to 50 minutes and he is concerned what may happen if his mother were to need an ambulance.

"She's going through cancer treatment," Dombrowski said.

"I'm petrified. Is anybody going to come? Is anybody going to be available?"

Assistant Fire Chief Ronnie Cordero, who has served on Company 1 for 37 years, said he supports the creation of a 24 hour paid ambulance service because the economy has forced many of his volunteers to work more than one job, thus detracting from their ability to volunteer.

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BRIEFS

FROM PAGE 22

Short film workshop

TOTOWA - Passaic County Film Commission is sponsoring a free workshop on short film production for high school, college and independent filmmakers 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. Saturday, **Oct. 25** at the offices of the Passaic County Department of Planning and Economic at Totowa Business Center, 930 Riverview Dr., Totowa, Suite 250.

The workshop will feature the basics of short film production taught by film commission members in the film industry. Topic includes script writing, proper equipment use, sound and lighting, shooting schedules, film promotion, legal issues and editing tips. Also, short films from past Passaic County Film Festivals will be shown.

The workshop will provide a review of the rules and regulations for the Passaic County Film Festival, which will be held Saturday, April 25, 2015. Film entries for the festival must be received

by Jan. 30, 2015.

The Passaic County Film Commission encourages entrants to the festival to attend the workshop. Those who do not attend the workshop may still enter films.

To RSVP email film@passaic-countynj.org or call 973-569-4720. For more information, visit www.passaiccountynj.org/film.

2014 general election

The 2014 General Election will be held on Tuesday, **Nov. 4** with polling hours from 6 a.m. to 8 p.m. Registered voters who cannot get to the polls may vote ahead of time in the Passaic County Clerk's office.

Office hours for in-person voting are Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. with extended hours on Saturday, **Oct. 25** and Saturday, **Nov. 1** from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. and 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Monday, **Nov. 3**.

The clerk's office is located at 401 Grand Street, 1st Floor, Room 130, Paterson.

If you need information, call the Passaic County Clerk's Election Division at 973-881-4127.

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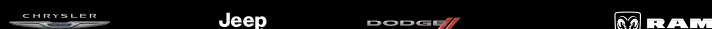
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