An emerging emergency service

November 9, 2009
by Paulina Reso

Tisch junior Cameron Justice was biking to his job at Palladium when his pedal snapped. The bike went flying and he crashed head first into the pavement. He called Public Safety, thinking Safe Ride could transport him to an emergency room. He told an officer, "Look, I could be bleeding in my brain. I need to go to the hospital."

Little did he know it would take four and a half hours before the NYU Health Center could take him to a hospital. He was released the same day and was left with bruising on his jaw and minor abrasions.

After his accident in June, Justice realized the need for student-run emergency medical services at NYU.

"It just hit me. NYU's a pretty prestigious school. It has a great medical program," he said. "Why don't we have this?"

In July he began developing NYU EMS. If approved by New York State, he hopes to have student EMTs staffing on-campus events.

He also started the Emergency Health Education Club, which certifies students in CPR. Students pay a discounted price of $80. The money earned will be put toward NYU EMS's efforts to raise money for a "fly car." This emergency vehicle has the necessary supplies to prepare a victim before EMTs arrive on-site. It is cheaper than an ambulance, which costs around $200,000.

NYU EMS is partnering with Woodhaven-Richmond Hill EMS, a volunteer transport agency based in Queens. Justice and his executive board have worked out a deal: If students sign a contract to volunteer with Woodhaven-Richmond Hill EMS for a required number of hours, they can take the EMT course for free. Classes usually range from $800 to $1,000. The 120-hour class will run from January to April.

Justice is well equipped to start these organizations. He is majoring in photography and imaging at Tisch but also has a pre-med concentration. He is trained in CPR, AED and first aid. And since June, Justice has been riding with the Central Park Medical Unit, a volunteer ambulance corps.

Growing up in Yakima, Wash., Justice was exposed to the medical world. His father works as a radiologist and his mother is a licensed nutritionist. But when his parents were hit by a drunk driver, the impact of the event rattled him and he clung to photography to cope. His mother left the hospital with four stitches, but his father was in a coma for two and a half weeks.

"It was my survival," he said. "It was a way I could safely explore the world and express what was going on inside."

Still, Justice knows he will become a doctor. After graduation he wants to take at least one year off before going to medical school. He is considering taking a surf photography course in Indonesia or going to paramedic school and working abroad.

According to Justice, NYU EMS would not only serve the university community, but it would relieve the city's overextended medical services. The group will be trained to determine if a patient should receive medical attention or not.

"We can save the city's EMS from responding to unnecessary calls," he said. "It would be a godsend for the city."