Death highlights ambulance issues
By LEIGH HORNBECK Staff Writer
Updated 08:28 p.m., Thursday, February 24, 2011

CORINTH -- Supervisor Richard Lucia's worst fear came true this week when a woman at Brookhaven Golf Course suffered a heart attack and there was no nearby ambulance to come to her aid.

The woman died at Saratoga Hospital after waiting 25 minutes for emergency personnel to arrive.

What started as strained contract negotiations between the Corinth Emergency Squad and the Town Board led to the loss of emergency medical services Jan. 31. The golf course in Greenfield was within the squad's coverage area, but they were out of commission. There were volunteer EMTs available, but no paramedics. EMTs can only provide basic life support, they cannot administer drugs.

Lucia said the Town Board scrambled to form a new unit using a donated ambulance and supplies. The new organization, called Jessups Landing, received certification Thursday to operate from the state Department of Health.

Jessups Landing was the first name of the town.

The paramedics may not respond to calls from inside the village of Corinth until the Board of Trustees finishes the application process for certification.

Lucia said the relationship between the Corinth Emergency Squad and the Town Board was fine for decades. Over time, he said, the town paid more and more to cover the cost of paramedics and equipment upgrades. To recoup the money, the town started doing the billing for ambulance service. When it came time to negotiate a new contract two years ago, Lucia said the board wanted more accountability from the squad about how it was spending taxpayer money.

"They just wanted the money without having to turn over invoices," the supervisor said.

The president of the squad, Janine Denton, could not be reached for comment, but a letter on the group's website explains their perspective.

It reads, in part, "CES had questions regarding the propriety of the town of Corinth billing on behalf of CES and retaining all amounts collected from the billing. CES was not granted access to billing records, including the amounts billed or collected." A closer look raised further questions about the legal relationship between the squad and the paramedics, which led to the paramedic shut-out.

The situation upset longtime volunteer Joel Jenkins, an EMT. Whether or not the absence of an ambulance corps in Corinth caused the death of the woman at Brookhaven will always be a
question, he said.

"If a paramedic was on the scene he could have administered drugs, put a heart monitor on. Only God knows if she could have been saved or if it was not meant to be," Jenkins said.

Reach Leigh Hornbeck at 454-5352 or by email at lhornbeck@timesunion.com