After almost 50 years of service to the Community, the Village Board threatens to close their doors. Without as much courtesy as Motel 6 extends to its customers, the Board may no longer be "keeping the light on for you" as early as next week. Why you ask? Great question, I say, but without a good answer to go with it.

First a little background. Prior to 1962, Brockport had no community ambulance. Ambulance service, so to speak, had been provided by a funeral home and then by one of the local mechanics that responded from his shop to take people to the hospital. Obviously, a better form of transportation and a need for Emergency Medical Services (EMS) was identified.

The Brockport Emergency Relief Squad Ambulance Corps was born as a result of long hours meeting with the Village Board, drafting members from the ranks of the five Brockport FD companies in late 1961 and presenting a formal proposal to the Village. On January 11, 1962, the Board approved the application of some 34 Charter Members to create an ambulance service and they had their work cut out for them. They had to train members, purchase and stock ambulances, continually recruit members and watch every dollar spent. They did this and did it well for about the next 48 years.

Originally, the money for the ambulances was from donations and fire taxes collected from the Village and the Towns of Sweden and Clarkson. This system worked very well. The ambulance officers would submit a budget annually and most years would roll surplus dollars back to the Board or over into the next year. No other department in the Village may make the same claim, but then we had the cheapest labor and no union. Our manhours were free and for most of the history, the men and women of the Brockport Ambulance were appreciated and commended by the members of the Village Board for their service to the community. Lately, this has not been the case, and that is a sad commentary.

In the early nineties, the leadership of the Corps had learned of alternative funding available to ambulance services referred to as "Third Party Billing". They investigated this option in concert with the Village. They had no idea upon implementation how much it would yield, but they were very pleased to be able to introduce the program to the three municipalities with the "hope" that it would offset or prevent future tax increases to the citizens it serves. Certain town supervisors seem to have forgotten there was no promise, as there was no historical data to support any such thing.

Well, history tells us this was the most successful program in the history of the Village. Not only did they hold the line on the taxes needed to provide the service, they eliminated them all together. That's right, I said
eliminated the need for any tax dollars from any citizen or property owner in the Village of Brockport, the Town of Sweden or the Town of Clarkson to have and maintain one of the finest Ambulance Corps in New York State.

Here's where the sticky part comes in. The Village continued to manage, or more appropriately; mismanage the program and its budget. They did not properly adjust the fees. They allowed the program fund balance to grow to over $600,000 at which time they were subjected to a NYS Audit. From day one of the "Third Party Billing" program, the ambulance leadership was told "that money IS to be used for Ambulance related expenses and those expenses alone". The Board failed to properly place the money in dedicated reserve accounts, so during the audit, they were criticized by NYS for having that large a surplus in the "general fund" balance. As with any question that is asked, if you ask enough people, sooner or later someone will give you the answer you are looking for, and so goes the "Ambulance Fund Balance". Against vehement opposition by Mayor Connie Castaneda, the Board got some opinion that the money was not designated or reserved, so they may use it as they see fit. They used it to balance their yearly budget. They secured a more impressive year end balance for the General Fund. They sucked what should have been, and was up to that point; Ambulance Reserves dry, and they stayed off the looming threat of dissolution by robbing Peter to pay Paul, so to speak.

Now, they have angered the two towns to the point that they contracted for a different ambulance service, despite strong opposition from their community volunteers at Town Board meetings, and now the "Ambulance Fund" is no longer self sufficient. Oh, that's right, because someone spent all the Ambulance Corps rainy day fund last year.

And, if that is not enough for you to chew on... there are people in this community that are upset. There are people that are outraged, and there are people that are saddened by this Board's lack of respect, lack of attention and failure to act effectively and appropriately surrounding their volunteer work force in their firefighters and EMS personnel. And the worst part of it, they don't seem to care.

The writer is one of those that is all three, and why wouldn't he be. He comes from a long line of Brockport Emergency Relief Squad personnel. His father; Jerome Martin, Sr. was one of the 34 Charter Members who was in the Corps from 1962 to 1971 leaving the organization upon his untimely death. His death was a result of a Motor Vehicle Accident in the Town of Sweden. One day he was tending to patients, and the next he was the patient. The writer joined four years later, and has been a member ever since riding with two of his siblings; Colin and Joseph during his tenure. You might say it was the second family business they were involved in. If you are from Brockport, then you will recall they were of the Tastee-Freez Martins, not the Martin Farms Martins.

So, bear with him, and many others if they get a little heated when you threaten to unnecessarily shut down a community ambulance service that has proudly served his hometown and yours for almost 50 years. Chances are if you rode in an ambulance during that time, you had a chance at having one of the Martin boys riding along side of you making sure you went home at the end of the day if you could.