EXCLUSIVE: Christine Quinn rescues Bronx ambulance corps with emergency $50k allocation

Discretionary funding from City Council speaker and mayoral hopeful saves beleaguered Thoggs Neck Volunteer Ambulance Corps from imminent shutdown.

By Denis Slattery / NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

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The non-profit Throggs Neck Volunteer Ambulance Corps has long relied on contributions from local residents and politicians’ discretionary funds to cover insurance, fuel, and operating costs.

A volunteer ambulance company in the Bronx received an eleventh-hour call that may save countless lives.

City Council speaker Christine Quinn has allocated $50,000 of discretionary spending to the beleaguered Throggs Neck Volunteer Ambulance Corps, which was on the verge of closing its doors before the financial shot in the arm.

The all-volunteer outfit, the last of its kind in the borough, has operated in the northeast Bronx for more than three decades.

“The community will still have neighbors helping neighbors,” said a grateful William Heaney, the chairman of the ambulance squad’s board.

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“We are looking forward to continuing our work in the community,” he said.

The non-profit emergency service has long relied on contributions from local residents and politicians’ discretionary funds to cover insurance, fuel, and operating costs.

But finances began to dry up over the past several years, leaving Heaney and his crew of 50 volunteers afraid they wouldn’t last the summer.

“There is a possibility that by Labor Day we may not be here,” director David Hochhauser told the Daily News last week.

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Quinn, a democratic candidate for mayor, has been criticized in the past for her power over discretionary funds as leader of the City Council.
City Council Speaker Christine Quinn Quinn, a democratic candidate for mayor, has been criticized in the past for her power over discretionary funds as leader of the City Council.

“We’re not looking at it as a mayoral thing, it’s a city council thing,” Heaney said. “We’ve been saved.”

As Speaker, Quinn has a controlling influence over a majority of the millions in discretionary funds that are distributed throughout the city.

The money for the Bronx ambulance company came out of the operating budget from the current fiscal year.

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“We are glad to be able to step in and help this vital group continue to protect the residents of North East Bronx,” Quinn said in a statement.

Although the allocation of the funds is perfectly normal, some said they wouldn’t be surprised if it raised a few eyebrows, coming so close to when people will be heading to the polls.

“The byproduct of being an elected official running for office is having the power of the purse,” said Christina Greer, Assistant Professor of Political Science at Fordham University. “And possibly more scrutiny closer to election day,”

Councilman James Vacca (D-Throgs Neck), a longtime supporter of the group, has also set aside $8,000 in funds for the corps in this year’s budget.

Heaney said he and his company were more than grateful for the help.

"We are here for others, and they were here for us," Heaney said.

“They came to our rescue.”