Volunteers hope to streamline Clinton, Ellenburg EMS system

By AMY HEGGEN Press-Republican

PLATTSBURGH — The Churubusco, Ellenburg Center and Ellenburg Depot volunteer fire departments, collectively, respond to about 250 emergency medical calls each year, taking patients to either Alice Hyde or CVPH medical centers.

That’s a tough job for too-few emergency medical technicians in the volunteer ranks, officials say.

So volunteers from those departments have joined forces, hoping to create a nonprofit called Northern Adirondack EMS.

“It’s going to be a unified system,” said Paul Harriman of Ellenburg Depot, who volunteers as a critical-care EMT and a firefighter.

He and Greg Poupore, a Churubusco Fire Department volunteer, are heading the effort.

ONE AMBULANCE DISTRICT

Currently, they are approaching the towns that fall within the departments’ combined territories, asking them to establish an ambulance district.

That would generate funds for the nonprofit services, as the district would be able to create a budget and set a tax rate for those who live within it.

“We’re going to create a big ambulance district that encompasses these three fire districts,” he said.

As an ambulance district, the nonprofit would also be able to bill patients and health-insurance companies, which would offset the cost to the taxpayer, Harriman explained.

“The community is going to have a better service,” he said. “This, we feel, is the best option out there.”

By combining resources, the ambulance service would have better communication and more volunteers available, he said.

The nonprofit hopes to have two paid staff members by 2015, which would ease the burden on the volunteers.
INCREASED CALLS

Harriman said that not as many people are able to give time to their fire departments these days.

“There are very few young people coming into the volunteer service,” he said.

Take Churubusco Fire Department, for example, which has only six EMTs signed on.

While volunteerism is dropping, Harriman has noticed an increase in EMS calls, something he attributes to the aging population of the communities.

Harriman also works full time as a nurse at Clinton Correctional Facility and is chairman of the Ellenburg Depot Fire District.

He understands the difficulty of balancing work and family life, in addition to giving his time to the fire company.

“We appreciate all that our volunteers do,” Harriman said.

Unpaid help would still be necessary in addition to the paid staff, should the EMS District be formed.

“We’re looking for people in the community that want to be involved,” he said.

Aside from EMTs, the nonprofit would need ambulance drivers and people who are interested in clerical work.

SIMILAR PROGRAMS

Harriman said other counties in New York have started similar programs.

The Thousand Islands Emergency Rescue Service in St. Lawrence County combined five fire districts into one EMS group. Harriman and others plan to visit that organization to see how the program is run.

Poupore and Harriman are hosting meetings about the proposed nonprofit, and Harriman said it’s important for people to attend and ask whatever questions they may have.

“We want to make sure that our community is taken care of,” Harriman said. “We want them to have the service that they need.”

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Three informational meetings about the proposed Northern Adirondack EMS will be held this month: 7 p.m. Tuesday, Jan. 28, at the Ellenburg Depot Fire Department, 5035 State Route 11. 7 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 30, at the Churubusco Fire Department, 1301 Clinton Mills Road. 7 p.m. Friday, Jan. 31, at the Ellenburg Center Fire Department, 1 Church Street.