

Marking a half century of sirens and service

ON CALL: And calling all volunteers: By giving your time to the Greece Volunteer Ambulance, you can reap myriad rewards.

By **MARGIE ZERCIE**

mzercie@messengerpostmedia.com

In the 50 years since its inception, the Greece Volunteer Ambulance has served and been served. Medics have helped bring babies into the world, attended to countless accident victims, quelled the fears of the young and old, and tended to everything from minor cuts to catastrophic injuries.

Those who have served have been rewarded with thankful smiles, warm embraces and the knowledge that they have made a difference, in many cases, of life-saving proportions.

A half-century ago, Greece Volunteer Ambulance answered the emergency care needs of a growing community. And it continues to serve — but like other corps of its kind, struggles to attract volunteers.

According to long-time volunteer Bill Joyce, of Greece, who serves on the Board of Directors, volunteers have gone on to become doctors, physician assistants, nurses and other medical professionals.

“I know of three volunteers who have become doctors and have stayed in the area to serve the local community at

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— Bill Joyce, longtime Greece Volunteer Ambulance volunteer

Unity and Strong hospitals. They got a good, solid start working with the ambulance,” Joyce noted.

The Greece Volunteer Ambulance grew out of the need to provide better emergency medical aid to the burgeoning community.

Shortly after its start, the ambulance group moved to its current base at 867 Long Pond Road, the cornerstone of the building was put in place on Aug. 12, 1959, by Vincent Tofany, a member of the Board of Directors and Greece town attorney; and Fred Strauss, organization treasurer. The base was dedicated on Sunday, Nov. 5, 1959.

Today, the group has about 45 volunteers and about 30 active members. In addition, half of the staff is now made

up of paid employees. The organization owns five defibrillators to treat cardiac patients, five ambulances and two vehicles equipped with life-support systems.

Funding is provided by third-party billing, the United Way, memorials and donations from the community. The ambulance group now serves residents of the Lakeshore and North Greece fire districts. In April 2007, the North Greece Fire Department started dispatching ambulance calls.

“We strive to give consumers the best care possible and that means well-trained people and staff that’s always available,” Joyce said.

Even though he has been involved with GVA for 38 years and has logged in about 53,000 hours of service, Joyce is still fired up about his volunteer work. He got hooked when he attended a tour with his children and soon afterward — moved by the excitement of it all and his desire to offer a hand — completed training for his first aid card. He has served as a medic as well as a driver.

“You just keep treating patients like someone you care about. That keeps you going,” Joyce said.

Unfortunately, Joyce added, these days it has been become increasingly difficult to secure volunteers for the ambulance service.

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creased training requirements, volunteerism is a harder sell. In the old days, we often had a waiting list of volunteers, many of them Kodak trick workers, who came directly here when they got off their shift,” Joyce explained.

But for those who continue to volunteer, the rewards are many.

Volunteer Scott Campbell started with GVA in 1987 by taking an advanced first aid course, became an EMT in 1988 and a driver in about 1995. Once a week, he and his wife, Valerie, both volunteers, give eight hours to the corps.

“Once our children were old enough, my wife joined GVA so that we could volunteer together. It’s a rewarding feeling to know you are helping people out when they are most vulnerable,” Campbell said. “I really enjoy sitting in the back of the ambulance with a patient, just talking with them and getting to know them. Many times, we find we have a lot of things in common, and that helps to ease the tense moments.”

Campbell said many times the volunteers receive touching thank-you notes from those they’ve helped.

“It really makes it all worthwhile. It’s a great way for my wife and I to give back to the community,” he added.

Anyone interested in volunteering may pick up an application at the GVA base on Long Pond Road or visit greeceambulance.com.