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Peninsula Ambulance Corps

Serving the Blue Hill Peninsula and Beyond



The Beginnings of Peninsula Ambulance Corps: A Community Affair

Nearly 50 years ago, ambulance service in the Blue Hill area was only the germ of an idea for new resident Ed Keller. An enthusiastic advocate of emergency care, Keller, in April 1966, approached Bob Bannister and the Blue Hill Chamber of Commerce about the desirability of a volunteer ambulance service. The Chamber was interested but tabled the suggestion for further study.

When the question again arose in May 1968, following strong advocacy by Bob Bannister, the Chamber generously responded by pledging \$1,000—a \$500 donation and a \$500 loan—to search for people interested in being trained for the purpose of initiating Keller's idea.

Once underway, preparations for the community service moved quickly. Before the month's end, a used Pontiac ambulance was purchased for \$700 and first-aid classes under the tutelage of Winslow Bowden were scheduled. Peninsula Ambulance Corps (PAC) was incorporated on June 12, 1968, and the red-and-white ambulance answered its first call two days later.

PAC's original officers, many of whom served for the next ten years, were Jerry Durnbaugh, president; Dr. Richard Britt, vice president; Edwin Keller, secretary treasurer; and board members Bob Bannister, Crystal Britt, Dorothy Murray, Percy Rowland, Marilyn Soderberg, and Gerald Wass.

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After 18 months of successful operation, Secretary Keller stated, "The generous support by both permanent and summer residents is an eloquent testimonial to the community spirit and kindness of neighbors." He also noted PAC's appreciation for Blue Hill Memorial Hospital's willingness to act as a clearinghouse for ambulance calls and the Blue Hill Fire Department's generous offer to house the vehicle.

With a total of 231 calls in that 18-month period (one every three days), PAC had amply demonstrated its value to the community. However, the roster of qualified volunteers had dwindled, and within two years the original crew had been severely reduced by employment conflicts, health issues, and family moves. In the words of President Durnbaugh, "We have used up all our stand-bys. They are all on regular crews."

A decade later the same problem was still high on PAC's to-solve list, when then-President Rusty Dym reminded The Weekly Packet readers, "The number of active members has steadily declined in recent years. The fact we must face is that unless there are more volunteers willing to donate their time, the fu-

ture of the Peninsula Ambulance Corps is in doubt."

There were serious issues facing the organization: too few volunteers to fill a schedule, vehicle woes, changing license requirements, lack of housing to accommodate duty crews, and the absence of a governing body. Resolving these problems would require many years and a large dose of community patience. But throughout the early years, the idea of "our ambulance service" had endured, and local residents were too proud to let it languish.

In a letter to a friend, E. B. White told of an ambulance call to his house: "The three corpsmen who showed up were (1) the editor of our weekly paper—at the controls, (2) the parson of the Congo church in Blue Hill—oxygen, and (3) the industrial arts teacher at the Academy—heavy lifting. It makes a lot of difference, at such moments, to have your friends drive in and go to work."

Community friends were the engine that had driven PAC's service to the Peninsula for the first years, and community friends would ensure its survival through the years ahead.

Letter from the President

Reading the historical sketch in this newsletter makes me realize how different were the challenges facing PAC nearly fifty years ago—and how surprisingly familiar they are. Back then, as now, volunteerism was the key to the service's success.

Our first ambulance cost \$700 in 1966. I don't know what that amounts to in today's dollars, but our most recent purchase of an ambulance and equipment totaled more than \$150,000. We now have a paid professional staff for two ambulances, a sea of regulatory burdens, and state of the art equipment and supplies that drive our annual operating budget over \$700,000. From this perspective, the challenges of fifty years ago look like a breeze.

Still, the biggest challenge of those days remains the biggest one today: community support. Back then, a large component was finding volunteers to drive the ambulance; today, it's finding volunteers to drive the organization. The current staff is composed of paid professionals because of the complexity of the services we offer and the necessary level of investment in their education. Our board of directors is challenged with issues of financial man-

agement, personnel, medical and professional standards, and a huge regulatory burden. And then there's fundraising

PAC is blessed with a stalwart group of volunteer board members who make it all happen. Finding people with the skills and dedication to serve on this board is a challenge in a world where volunteerism is diminishing and many organizations compete for finite resources. A slow turnover of members along with a regular infusion of new blood help PAC in maintaining both its consistency and vitality. With a well-rounded board of directors, no one is over burdened and the miracles continue.

Without well-qualified and dedicated directors and committee people, there would be no Peninsula Ambulance Corps. There would also be none of the security and satisfaction that comes with knowing that we have an ambulance service that is first-rate—and that you helped to make it so.

