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Peninsula Ambulance Corps, Inc.

Serving the Blue Hill Peninsula and Beyond



A Letter from the President

Times are tight for Maine's municipalities. The State and Federal governments often try to balance their own budgets, in part, by reducing support to local governments. Still, this year the Peninsula Ambulance Corps (PAC) asked for and received a 43% increase in financial contributions from the towns we serve. We'd been receiving \$7 per citizen, and we requested that this be increased to \$10. Why? Because if the towns wanted this quality ambulance service to continue, only the towns could make it happen.

Our decision to request this increase began in a routine PAC Board meeting. The agenda included a couple of personnel issues and the annual appeal letter. A lengthy discussion ensued regarding the acquisition of a new \$142,000 ambulance and how to pay for it. Conversation flowed to the possibility of a capital campaign.

Though a previous capital campaign initiated in 2003 had been successful, two major differences between then and now emerged in our discussion. First, we've grown into a larger operation than we were back then, and we must now raise \$150,000 annually to cover an operating deficit caused primarily by insufficient payments from

Medicare/Medicaid. Second, another new ambulance costing about \$150,000 will soon be needed. Therefore, a capital campaign for two units would require \$300,000 in three years. PAC's much-needed annual appeal would run concurrently with that capital campaign.

The life span of an ambulance is about 10 years. If, in the best case, purchases were staggered to buy one unit every five years, simultaneous capital and annual campaigns of \$150,000 each would run six years out of every ten. This effort would not only be daunting, but it would also exhaust the capabilities of our volunteer board and the citizens of our service area. Simply put, this constant cycle of fundraising is not sustainable. Even if the board could bear the demands, the public could not, and our existing good will would wear thin. We needed a more consistent and reliable funding mechanism. We needed a reserve account that's funded consistently, as our ambulances wear out.

And so the board reached a consensus that, while a capital campaign was necessary in order to cover the purchase of our most

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recent ambulance and its companion, this should be the final such campaign intended to finance ambulance replacement. We would, instead, approach the towns we serve for funding.

The town officers and citizens asked hard questions: How, in these lean times, could municipalities be expected to increase their contributions? Our case was simple at its core: If we, the citizens of the Blue Hill Peninsula, were to continue to have an ambulance service, it was up to the towns we live in to help make it happen.

At all six town meetings in our service area this year,

the citizens of Blue Hill, Brooklin, Brooksville, Penobscot, Sedgwick, and Surry gave their support to PAC by voting for this increase in funding.

PAC's capability is only as strong as the support of its citizens and their governments, and these town meetings assured us that your ambulance service—indeed, our ambulance service—is strong and its future is solid. We'll conduct just one more capital campaign to cover the cost of an ambulance and, after that, together, we'll pay as we go.



PAC is Always Willing to Help

The primary purpose of the Peninsula Ambulance Corps is to serve locally. However, we believe it is important also to be of service in the larger community around us.

PAC believes the best way to ensure competence and excellence in its field is to take an active role in educating the people who provide emergency medical service. We make training and educational opportunities available not only to our own staff but also to members of other service organizations and to students working to satisfy the practical experience requirement of their EMS courses.

A perfect example of this educational outreach is demonstrated in the on-going cooperative effort of Theresa Cousins* and Katelyn Damon**.

Katelyn is a stipended volunteer hired by Americorps, a network of local, state and national service programs that connects more than 70,000 Americans each year in intensive service to meet our country's critical needs in education, public service, health and the environment.

Goodwill Industries of Northern New England is such a service program and, through its Emergency Response Corps, aid is available to rural New England communities who request help with their emergency services.

Katelyn was hired by Americorps in October 2010, in response to the Town of Cranberry Isles' request for help in solving island-specific issues associated with fire suppression and emergency medical services. With no background in either field, Katelyn knew the first step was to organize a Basic EMT course. She was put in touch with Theresa, who had lived on Isle au Haut and had organized and implemented the island-specific emergency services required there.

Theresa agreed to drive to Northeast Harbor each Friday for eight weeks, where she caught the 5:00 pm ferry that deposited her dockside in Islesford. She then conducted 20 hours of EMT Basic instruction for a class of 10—two participants from Great Cranberry and eight from Islesford—before departing on the ferry's final trip Sunday evening.

Islands pose significant challenges to building an emergency medical service, including isolation; a limited population, especially in winter; and an aging citizenry. But before tackling those larger issues, Katelyn was faced

with the task of finding two months of weekend housing for Theresa and her helpers, as well as for the two students from Great Cranberry, and providing food on an island with no restaurant or store. Both lodging and meals were gladly offered by island residents and cleared the way for students to concentrate on class instruction.

Following the completion of the Basic EMT class, her connections to PAC still strong, Katelyn returned to Blue Hill to complete the final practical requirements needed for her first exam, including an eight-hour shift in an ambulance—a PAC ambulance, of course!

With all her training now complete, Katelyn happily states, "The course was one huge hurdle to tackle, but we have almost completed it. Our practical exams will be held on May 21. When we pass that portion, we'll move on the written section—and then, finally, we'll be EMTs."

"However," she continues, "there's a lot of pressure on an island EMT. We're not paid—we're on call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Further, the islands of Islesford and Great Cranberry are our homes. We know everyone by name in these tight-knit communities, so when we're called out, we know we're going to help our friends and neighbors."

Theresa echoes those words, saying: "I can't say enough about the Islesford group. They knew they needed to be better than newly-licensed mainland providers, and they are. Their work ethic and willingness to step out of their comfort zones to improve emergency care for their town is the basis upon which Peninsula Ambulance Corps was founded on in 1968 and the philosophy that encourages our volunteer services today.

Emergency service on the Cranberry Isles is a necessity, but Katelyn knows the challenges of an island community will continue. However, in working with PAC, Katelyn has found the EMS and fire communities to be both welcoming and willing to help. And the Peninsula Ambulance Corps—and all its employees who instruct and support—believes this involvement in the larger EMS community is what helps to make PAC strong.

* PAC paramedic and certified instructor for Northeast EMS and Eastern Maine Community College

** Emergency Preparedness Agent, Town of Cranberry Isles