

engine or an ambulance to show the public and answer questions,” said Susi.

In Thomaston, where fire and police are separate entities, EMS Chief Ruston “Rusty” Barnard oversees a crew that fluctuates between 20 and 25 paid and volunteer EMS providers. While daytime slots are paid on a per diem basis seven days a week, overnight coverage is based on volunteers, either at the station or on call if they are nearby.

“We have sufficient personnel here to not have to worry about nighttime coverage — if each individual would commit to serving twice a month,” Barnard noted. But engaging them to do just that on a reliable basis can be a challenge.

“Most of our Thomaston people also work full time somewhere else — in fire or EMS, or an altogether different field,” said Barnard, who was named EMS chief here four years ago, after serving a number of years as Deputy Chief. Barnard himself is a career firefighter/Paramedic who works in another town, as well as in Thomaston.

He “gets” the appealing camaraderie of the fire house ambiance, but has noted a disconnect sometimes when members of the older generation don’t engage in mentorship, which helps create the culture. Another possible factor is Generation Y’s leaning toward electronic connection over personal interaction.

“We do have a social media presence, but since Thomaston averages a modest 500 calls a year, there is not always a lot to post,” Barnard said.

And since the majority of those calls come in during the day, for those on the overnight roster the lower likelihood of responding to a call can dampen morale.

Barnard makes a conscientious effort to educate new and prospective new members as to what to expect on the job, day or night.

“Some people anticipate an action-packed shift: lights and sirens, with accompanying blood and gore—but lots of times it’s about checking out chest pain, or lifting a person off the floor. And then rinsing off the ambulance, and restocking supplies as needed,” he said. “Even if you are a volunteer, there is a certain level of professionalism needed to serve your

fellow citizens.”

In return, Thomaston EMS is willing to make a substantial investment in its personnel. Once a background check is successfully completed, anyone looking to enroll in licensing courses is eligible for 100 percent education reimbursement from Thomaston EMS. To maintain fiscal accountability to the EMS service and Thomaston taxpayers, a signed agreement is required. For example, in exchange for the cost of enrolment in a Paramedic licensure program, valued at approximately \$10,000, the candidate agrees to commit to signing on for Thomaston EMS duty one night a week, for a period of two years.

Even for those not seeking licensure, “Give us two nights a month, and attend 60 percent or more of the meetings and drills, and we will pay for any outside training you wish to pursue,” said Barnard. Thanks to this policy, a half dozen Thomaston EMS members took advantage of the opportunity to attend the annual Atlantic Partners

EMS Seminar at The Samoset Resort for cutting-edge training and continuing education credit last November. Four crew members recently completed a CPR instructor class, in order to teach resuscitation out in community.

Planning is underway with representatives from the Maine Emergency Management Agency for a collaborative, multi-jurisdictional disaster drill, to be staged in collaboration with other and local public safety responders.

“The more well-rounded education our individual members pursue, the better equipped our service is as a whole, to prepare for whatever comes along,” says Barnard.

“We do make an effort to share the load and fill in for each other,” says Barnard, but from time to time, some EMS providers will in all likelihood miss family gatherings, birthdays, their child in the school play, concert or the big game.

The only thing more certain is the feeling of self worth and satisfaction that comes with giving back to the community.



Youth outreach is one way to enhance community interest in emergency medical services. Last June, about 35 fifth graders at Crescent Park School in Bethel received their CPT certification following instruction by members of Bethel Ambulance.



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