

Halifax forms own EMS agency

NICOLE ORNE, Reformer Staff

Saturday, March 22 HALIFAX -- Just before a surprise snowstorm that likely set most of their pagers a-buzzing, the Halifax community formed its own Emergency Medical Services squad. "Clap on, we exist," Interim Chief Christina Moore joked. "We've granted ourselves permission to exist."

Those who had volunteered to participate all signed a statement printed on tanned paper with big, flourishing signatures, reminiscent of the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

The idea for the squad, Moore said, was to provide first responders for the town, which sometimes has to wait up to half an hour for ambulance service because of its location. "My vision is to provide EMS to the town of Halifax and deliver care safely, with dignity and compassion," said Moore.

The time was right, she said, for this initiative to begin. "It seemed like we had enough momentum. We're at the point to have a serious conversation."

The first responders would not replace ambulance services provided by Whitingham Ambulance, but would be assisting by preparing a patient for transport while an ambulance is en route.

Moore said that the Whitingham service was supportive of their efforts.

Fourteen people attended Thursday night's meeting and most signed on for the team. At least half of these had some form of EMT training.

The others would be trained by Interim Capt. Paul Blais. This would meet the minimum of six people the state required to qualify as an agency.

The group would now begin the long task of gaining licensing, which would require, time, paperwork and a public hearing to receive input.

Moore guessed this might take up to nine months to complete. They also needed to apply for IRS nonprofit status, which could take up to a year.

Moore estimated the group could be really official by December 2008.

In that time, though, they could be training as a squad to bring all the members up to speed and establish a way to work well together.

"We're a squad starting from scratch," Moore said. "We have to develop a system that works for this town, this terrain, with the equipment that we have, with the personalities that we have."

Selectboard member Mitchell Green also attended to let the group know they had the support of the board, which passed a motion the night before to recognize the agency.

Equipment and funding will be acquired creatively. Money would come mostly from grants or fundraisers, Moore said. Many of the members, all passionate about saving lives

and doing what they do, already own a lot of the equipment needed. She had also found a fire department with a number of old pagers they didn't need anymore.

"The commitment we make, as a team, is that we can provide services all day, all night, every day of the year. This means that the squad must be comprised of people who come from all walks of life: those who are here during the day, those who can respond at night, those who can cover during weekends. It will have to be comprised of people who are retired, working, at-home parents, night-shift, young and not-so-young. It is through this blend that we'll have a squad that can provide the required services and sustain for the years and decades to come," Moore reported to the Selectboard.

She said Thursday that she wanted the squad to be welcoming to all.

"There has to be room and a role for everyone who comes out and plays."

Just as important as volunteers and funding, she told the board, "Halifax EMS has to be something that the citizens of Halifax want, believe in and support."

The squad will meet every fourth Monday at 7 p.m.

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