

Potential volunteers on waiting list for local fire, rescue squad

Written by Elizabeth Barrett
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May 18-24 Emergency Medical Services Week.

Many communities can only dream about the number of volunteers on Gothenburg's Fire Department and Rescue Squad.

The department has a full roster with 44 fire fighters of which 25 are basic emergency medical technicians (EMTs).

Two want-to-be's are on a waiting list.

The reason?

"Because Gothenburg has people who care about the community and want to help out," said rescue captain Jason Wagner.

Wagner describes the number as unusually high since the job doesn't pay and members serve on a volunteer basis.

It's especially atypical in light of the nationwide shortage of emergency medical services (EMS) personnel that is expected to grow as baby boomers age, Wagner said.

EMTs and paramedics care for the sick or injured in emergency medical settings. Paramedics undergo more training than EMTs.

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Kent Kline and Shane Butterfield are the local paramedics on the squad.

Wagner said people's lives often depend on the quick reaction and competent care of EMTs and paramedics.

"We get the patient to a hospital as quickly and safely as possible," Wagner said, noting that at least one EMT must be on board before the ambulance leaves the fire hall.

The squad encounters people in crisis, he said, which requires both compassion and patience.

Each year, Wagner said the rescue squad responds to an average of 250 calls for emergency services which also includes transfers to larger hospitals and providing a stand-by ambulance at football games.

On average, about 70 calls are fire related and include such things as checking carbon monoxide levels and standing by for gas leaks.

Response time averages four to five minutes and the highest number of calls are for medical transport to a hospital.

"That can be anything from difficulty breathing to cardiac arrest," Wagner said.

Patient transfers to hospitals in Lincoln and Omaha have dropped in recent years.

