

Column: College Community Connection

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Answering a Call for Help

By Dr. Al Roberts

It starts with a call for help. When an incident causes serious illness or injury, someone makes a phone call. Each occurrence is different. There are traffic-related injuries, workplace accidents, heart attacks, strokes, falls, and countless other events that place life and limb at risk.

After the call, emergency vehicles respond. Every time I pull over to let an ambulance dash on its way, the occasion reminds me to be thankful for the comprehensive system that exists to ensure that urgent medical care arrives when and wherever it is needed.

In years gone by, the situation was different. The Emergency Medicine Residents' Association explains "The system we have in place today was forged one link at time, dating as far back as the Civil War. With widespread trauma, a systematic and organized method of field care and transport of the injured was born out of necessity. It wasn't until 1865, however, that the first civilian ambulance was put into service in Cincinnati."

Our nation's first independent, volunteer rescue squad was established in Roanoke, Virginia in 1928. Virginia's first EMT-paramedics were certified in 1976. Today, the existence of emergency personnel waiting to be called into action is so ubiquitous that their presence is easy to take for granted.

To help raise awareness, the National Association of Emergency Medical Technicians and the American College of Emergency Physicians work together in support of National EMS Week to recognize the contributions of personnel who bring pre-hospital care to people in need. This year, National EMS Week will be observed on May 20-26. On behalf of the faculty, staff, and students of SVCC, I offer these dedicated practitioners a wholehearted "Thank you" in recognition of all they do to safeguard the wellbeing of people across our communities.

Beyond giving thanks, I also feel a sense of pride. Many of the men and women who serve as EMTs and paramedics across the counties that comprise Southside Virginia received their training from programs at SVCC. As Bobby Lester, one of the College's Emergency Medical Technician instructors explains, "The EMS program is vital to the community because it provides an avenue for our students to provide care to the citizens of our local community. Many of our students become volunteer members at local EMS and fire departments."

Ricky Lyles, Instructor of Fire Science and Emergency Medical Services, wants prospective students to know, "SVCC offers a comprehensive slate of courses to prepare students for EMS careers." These include four Career Studies Certificates and an Associate's degree in Emergency Medical Services.

If you want to be prepared to answer someone's call for help, you can contact Ricky Lyles (ricky.lyles@southside.edu or 434-736-2097) or Bobby Lester (bobby.lester@southside.edu or 434-949-6603) for more information.

Dr. Al Roberts is president of Southside Virginia Community College, an institution of higher learning that provides a wide variety of education opportunities to a diverse student population within a service area that spans ten counties and the city of Emporia. He can be reached via email at al.roberts@southside.edu.