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EMS services on board with program

By JEFF GILL

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Representatives from four ambulance services agreed Thursday night they will participate in a program to provide their availability to the Huntingdon County 911 Dispatch Center to help improve response times in emergency situations.

Approximately 35 people from Orbisonia Rockhill, Twin Creeks, Three Springs and Saxton ambulance companies were present at a meeting to learn more about the program at the Huntingdon Borough Building, which houses the 911 center. They will join Juniata Valley, Marklesburg, Huntingdon, Mount Union and Robertsdale, Wood & Broad Top (RW&BT) EMS groups, which recently participated in a threemonth trial period.

The group heard from the program's designers, Bill Corbin and Joe Thompson, about how the program works and its benefits.

"The meeting went well and I am very pleased with the turnout of the ambulance and QRS services that made it out here tonight," said Huntingdon County 911 director Rufus Brenneman. "This program will improve response times for people in need."

The program will help local ambulance services fall in line with a directive from the state Department of Health and the Southern Alleghenies Emergency Medical Services that requires all emergency medical services to notify the county's 911 dispatch center of their availability 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Thompson told the group Thursday night the three-month trial period showed response times were cut by six minutes and failures to respond were cut in half.

"This was because of the services letting the center know who was available and who wasn't so we could

get someone on the road faster,” Thompson said. “This program will not only help save time, but save lives.”

Corbin explained how the ambulance services will be able to show their availability. He also explained how services can use the Internet, even via smartphone, to inform the center of its crew’s availability.

“You can do it from just about anywhere,” Corbin said. “As soon as you show the availability, the dispatch center will know almost immediately.”

While the program has been a topic of conversations among EMS services, Thompson clarified some of the rumors and concerns he’s heard.

“You will not have to have someone on duty at your station 24/7,” Thompson said. “You will not have to have full-time staffing. We are not forcing anyone to become a paid service. This program is for you, as providers, to let us know if you have a crew available or not.”

Mount Union EMS captain Traci Jenkins took part in the trial period and was pleased with the program.

“At first, it was very overwhelming, but once we got to use the program, it worked very well and I love it,” Jenkins said. “You can see who is the closest available unit out there to help you. I know where my crew is at all times. Whether I’m at home or somewhere else, I can find out where they are by using my phone. I know if they are still on a call or back in the station and I can get in contact with them any time.”

Thompson said Huntingdon County may be the first to implement this program.

“We are ahead of the curve,” Thompson said. “This is part of the 911 Next Generation.”

The 911 Next Generation will allow dispatchers to get crews to emergency situations by calls, text messages, photo messages and by social media.

Carl Moen, executive director of the Southern Alleghenies Emergency Medical Services (SAEMS), said the program is something no other county in the SAEMS region has.

“This is a great system developed at the local level to fit their needs and the community needs while improving patient care,” Moen told the group Thursday night. “It is great to see people working together.”

Thompson said after the meeting that was been rewarding to work with Corbin, the other dispatchers and the five ambulance services during the trial period.

“I am very proud to say there were no major issues,” Thompson said. “I think the implementation of the program throughout the county speaks volumes about the commitment of the emergency services personnel of the county and their willingness to build upon that. We shared with them openly the concerns we heard from them and we got good feedback and we addressed those concerns. But, more importantly, this was a homegrown effort by everyone who has been working together. This was a total team effort.”

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