

Inspiring Volunteerism

Unique Partnership Aims to Boost Ambulance Squad Ranks

More than 90 percent of New Jersey's ambulance squads are run by volunteers. On the front lines of care, these units are vital links to health care delivery as they respond to an estimated 800,000 emergency calls each year. Their value is immeasurable, yet their future is in jeopardy because of an unprecedented shortage of trained volunteers.

A report released by the state Department of Health and Senior Services affirms that New Jersey's emergency medical services are at risk, as the majority of ambulance squads struggle for staffing and resources to maintain around-the-clock coverage for their communities. Squads in the West Essex region, for example, have experienced dramatic declines in volunteerism over the past several years. As a result, some have been forced to recruit paid emergency medical technicians (EMTs) and personnel, straining the squads' finances and compromising their long-term viability.

In pursuit of its mission, The Mountainside Health Foundation has taken action with a unique initiative that provides immediate assistance while positively impacting the community — as well as aspiring college graduates.

The Foundation granted \$32,000 to establish a **Scholarship Fund for Ambulance Squad Student-Volunteers** in cooperation with Montclair State University and Montclair Volunteer Ambulance Unit (MVAU), one of the local squads in greatest need. Slated to launch this Fall, this pilot program will issue \$4,000 scholarships to eight eligible students enrolled at the University, providing approximately one half of each recipient's annual tuition fee. As part of the scholarship agreement, each student will commit to volunteering as an EMT for MVAU.

“This is a perfect reflection of how the Foundation can advance health care in our communities,” stated A. Duncan Kidd, Trustee, Mountainside Health Foundation. “We created a task force to study the issue, encourage collaboration and lead the process of finding a creative solution.” Representatives from Montclair State University, MVAU and local towns worked diligently to partner the needs of the ambulance squad with the resources of college students and the Foundation. Harris Cohen, a stalwart of the ambulance corps and advocate of numerous community projects, was instrumental in guiding the discussions and facilitating the outcome.

The scholarship program offers tremendous promise for all involved, helping the ambulance unit operate and achieve fiscal stability while also benefiting local college students and the community at large. “This partnership will help our students defray the cost of education and understand how important it is to give back,” asserted Thomas J. Haynes, Ph.D., Vice President, University Advancement, Montclair State University. “They'll come away from college with a much richer experience... and help other people in the process.”

If the pilot program is successful, the Mountainside Health Foundation plans to expand the scholarships to other colleges and rescue squads in the West Essex region.

*The Foundation welcomes donations from individuals who are interested in preserving ambulance service for our community. To make a tax-deductible contribution to **Scholarship Fund for Ambulance Squad Student-Volunteers**, please call the Mountainside Health Foundation at (973) 746-6130.*