

Saving lives in a heartbeat

Greece Volunteer Ambulance celebrates 50 years in service

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GREECE — In January 1959, Greece Volunteer Ambulance started out with 16 volunteers and two Cadillac hearses converted into ambulances.

That first year, the ambulance corps responded to 600 calls for service.

"In the beginning, they used to just throw people in the back (of the ambulance) and race to the hospital," said Mike Shannon, GVA director of operations. "Now, we bring the emergency room to you."

Fifty years after ambulance corps organizers recognized a need for Greece to have its own medical transportation service, GVA has expanded to a crew of 11 full-time paid staff, 30 part-time staff and more than 65 volunteers, and has five ambulances and two "fly cars" to provide advanced life support services.

Last year, the corps responded to more than 4,000 calls for service within its coverage area, in the North Greece and Lakeshore fire districts.

Emergency medicine has changed significantly over the years: In 1959, volunteers needed only 20 hours of first aid training.

Now, a basic emergency medical technician needs at least 120 hours of training, and a paramedic needs a full 800 hours of classroom time alone.

Bill Joyce has been with the corps as a volunteer for 37 years. He's been to car crashes and fires, treated elderly people who have



JAMIE GERMANO staff photographer

Mike Shannon is an emergency medical technician and director of operations for Greece Volunteer Ambulance. The 1970s TV show *Emergency!* sparked the public's interest in emergency medical services.

fallen, comforted the dying, delivered 19 babies and much, much more.

"When I started, it all used to be scoop and run," he said. "We had none of the advanced techniques and only the guys with a strong stomach could stick it out."

Joyce said the importance of quick medical response to emergencies started gaining cachet in the early 1970s with the popular television show *Emergency!*

"To this day, they still talk about how *Emergency!* really is what got the interest in being a paramedic started," he said.

Operating out of a converted house at 867 Long Pond Road since the early 1960s, the ambulance

corps hopes to raise money in coming years to build a new base.

"Funny thing is, GVA started out in an old water treatment plant on Latta Road," said Joyce. "From there, one member of our charter group loaned GVA the money to build a house on Long Pond Road. The reason they built a house was that they were thinking if the ambulance service didn't work out, they could always sell the house to get the money back.

"But since 1961, we just kept adding on."

The now-required training and increased responsibility for EMS providers, however, is taking a toll on the corps's ability to attract volunteers.

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For information about volunteer opportunities with Greece Volunteer Ambulance, call (585) 227-2073 or go to www.greeceambulance.com.

"Services like this are really at a crossroads," said Joyce. "People don't have the time to volunteer anymore, and the requirements are starting to get restrictive. That means we need to focus on retention and recruitment of new members."

EMT Jerry Smith, a retired stockbroker and 40-hour-a-week volunteer, said he joined GVA a few years ago "because if I was going to do something with my retirement time, I might as well do something worthwhile and make some good friends."

Joyce said the corps is open to all with an interest in medicine and the compassion to care for people.

"We always train people to treat each patient as if they are someone they really love — their mother, their father, a grandparent," he said.

"When people are sick or injured, they need somebody who can help." □

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Bill Joyce of Greece, right, checking bags with Chris Fall of Penfield, has been with the Greece Volunteer Ambulance Corps for 37 years. The organization has been in operation for 50 years and has grown from 16 volunteers to 41 full- and part-time paid staff and more than 65 volunteers.