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FIRST RESPONDERS

a newsletter of the WHITESTONE COMMUNITY VOLUNTEER AMBULANCE SERVICE

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Ralph M. Cefalo,
President

Dear Neighbor,

Welcome to the premier issue of the Whitestone Community Volunteer Ambulance Service newsletter, *First Responders*. This communication tool will help to familiarize you with the services we provide for you, your family, and our community.

As someone who has been a member of this organization for more than a quarter of a century, I have observed many changes. For example, pre-hospital care (formerly known as First Aid) has greatly advanced. And, when we dispatch an ambulance to someone in need, at least one member of the team is always a NYS Emergency Medical Technician.

We're a corps of emergency volunteer workers who care about the people in our community. But sadly over the years our numbers have dropped off. This attrition hikes up the stress when we make calls — for this reason, we're looking for people to help us help our community. We offer an annual EMT course as well as Cardio-Pulmonary Resuscitation and Pre-hospital Care courses to our members free of charge. Once trained, a few hours of your time a week as a dispatcher or medic can make all the difference to our community —

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An Idea Grows in Queens...



This Ford-model ambulance transport vehicle is the 20th in our fleet since 1948.

Back in 1947, after several incidents whereby injured people waited a perverse amount of time for the city ambulance corps to arrive, a humanitarian idea was born. The Whitestone, Beechhurst, Malba, Robinwood, and later Clearview communities would provide free ambulance service, thanks in large part to the Whitestone Community Post of the Veterans of Foreign Wars. Thomas A. Robertson was appointed to investigate the feasibility of such a project. All civic, fraternal, and veteran organizations of the community were contacted to raise this idea at their meetings. The proposal, for the most part, met with great enthusiasm, and the first general meeting was held with 37 groups represented.

A corporation was formed in 1947 under the laws of the State of New York

to be named, Whitestone Community Ambulance Service, Inc. Years later the word "volunteer" was added. An all-out door-to-door fundraising campaign was launched but did not meet with immediate success.

An empty store front in the village of Whitestone was donated to house and display the medical equipment and to accept donations. In the summer of 1948 WCVAS purchased its first vehicle — a fully equipped Cadillac ambulance transport — the first call came in on September 1, 1948.

Training fell under the auspices of the American Red Cross and Mr. Ralph Gode, WCVAS' first honorary member, provided the instruction.

It was only after the ambulance transport vehicle was in service and

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Members of the Whitestone Community Volunteer Ambulance Service circa 1960.

An Idea Grows in Queens...

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the community became more cognizant of its importance, that the funds started flowing in. In February 1949, a fundraising dance held at the Whitestone Naval Militia building finally took the Service into the "black." In addition, the 1949 fundraiser brought in enough funds to pay off the ambulance transport vehicle and allowed for the purchase of a Stevenson Resuscitator, a Kidde respirator, six hospital beds, six wheel chairs, crutches, canes, sterile sheets, a doctor's medical bag, medical supplies, sheets, pillow cases, and blankets.

It took some time before the Ambulance Service could be housed under one roof. The first ambulance transport vehicles were garaged at Gleason's Funeral Home where volunteers had access to phones 24-hours-a-day (no small item when cell phones were not yet invented and phones were a luxury). There were many times when great confusion grew because the phone was

answered, "Gleason's Funeral Home," and the caller had a medical emergency or vice versa, when the phone was answered, "WCAS" but the caller wanted to make funeral arrangements.

Furthermore, until WCVAS found a home for itself, volunteers slept in a "ready room" built in the Gleason's Funeral Home garage. For that construction, the lumber was donated. Regular meetings were held at Parkway Inn where ambulance participants' words were often drowned out by the raucous voices raised in the bar area. The wheelchairs, hospital beds and crutches were housed at the Herold garage, including a 1953 station wagon. When the station wagon became a nuisance because it wasn't always available — too many "taxi" calls — it was smartly traded in for the efficiency a second ambulance transport vehicle could provide.

In 1955, WCVAS purchased the present-day building located at 150th Street. In 1993, the building was named in honor of Grace Herold who was celebrating her 90th birthday that year. She gave 45 years of active

service to the Corps. Eventually meeting rooms, offices, and a garage for a third vehicle were built onto the building. Today, the WCVAS garage houses its 20th and 21st ambulance transport vehicles purchased over these 50 years. In March of 1997 defibrillators were added to each of the vehicles.

The trophies in the meeting room, received from EMT Drill competitions and Ambulance competitions are a testament to the diligence and care performed at WCVAS. Training, vehicles, and equipment are state-of-the-art — offering the community the finest emergency service available in the area — a standard set by those early pioneers in 1947. ❖

If you or someone you know needs our help, call us at 718-767-1000

We cannot be reached by calling 911.

What You Need to Know About WCVAS

Programs

• **Youth Squad:** It's 10 p.m. do you know where your children are? If they're between the ages of 15 and 18, they should be members of our Youth Squad just returning home from a meeting or training session. Youth Squad members learn citizenship, character, and pre-hospital care (formerly known as First Aid) training, skills that they will carry with them throughout their lives to give back to their own communities and families ... and it looks good on their resume.

• **Blood Drive:** We hold a blood drive each year, jointly with the New York Hospital of Queens. And this past August 21st we co-sponsored a blood drive with Waldbaums of Whitestone. Thankfully, we met our goal.



• **Training:** We provide all training in house, FREE to members. And, when membership is at peak, we provide Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) training to groups in our community upon request.

• **WCERT:** The Whitestone Community Emergency Response Team Program is in its infancy but will soon help train people to be better prepared to respond to emergency situations in the community. Volunteers will give support to first responders, provide immediate assistance to victims, organize spontaneous volunteers at a disaster site, and help improve the safety of the community on an ongoing basis.

Volunteers

• **WCVAS volunteers:** These are your friends and neighbors that feel this is a wonderful way to "give back" to our community. A good number of our volunteers have been with us for more than 30 years. Volunteers are comprised of dispatchers, drivers, and technicians.

• **Board of Directors:** Our all-volunteer board of directors is responsible for the operations and business end of WCVAS.

• Become a WCVAS Volunteer:

Several of our volunteers have

received "Stork Pins" for delivering babies, while others have received



"CPR Save Pins," for restoring life. Can you even imagine how wonderful it feels to truly "be there" for someone at a life-and-death time of crisis? Wouldn't you like to become an active part of one of the oldest and respected community groups in Whitestone? We need help — our community depends on our volunteers.

Successes

• **Competitions:** Our EMT Drill Team and Ambulance Team have

competed in state and international competitions. In early October, our teams placed third in the NYS Championships held in Lake George.



• **9/11 Stand-by Service:** During the 9/11 disaster, we were on stand-by with FDNY to provide ambulance transport vehicle service in Whitestone. FDNY vehicles were tied up at the disaster. After 9/11 we were at the scene delivering food, clothing, and medical supplies donated by local merchants.

• **Flight 587 Stand-by Service:** We were placed on stand by for FDNY immediately after the Flight 587 crash on November 12 in the Breezy Point section of Queens.

Services

• **Free Loaner Program:** We have a supply of crutches, walkers, and wheelchairs available at *no charge*.

• **Hospital Choices:** We take our patients to the hospital of their *choice* within the 5 Boroughs of New York City and Nassau County.

• **Blood Pressure Screening:** We provide FREE blood pressure screening at our headquarters and at a variety of locations throughout the community. If you would like to have your blood pressure taken, please call the dispatcher first where arrangements can be made.

• **We're on Call:** To reach us 24-hours-a-day, seven days a week, you must call 718-767-1000. We cannot be reached by calling 911. Your call will always be answered by a live operator. Our trained dispatchers are courteous, attentive listeners, and they expediently dispatch ambulances when needed. Place our phone number on every phone in your house. If you would like telephone sticker(s), please call us.

Funding

• **Contributions:** We are solely funded by community contributions. We receive no government funding, or income from your taxes. Many ambulance corps have these types of income streams, we do not.

• **Annual Fund Drive:** We will be sending you our annual fund drive letter very soon. Please be generous — to help us upgrade and continue the vital services we extend to our community. The fund drive is a help in covering many of our costs. Additional funding from our friends Senator Frank Padavan, Senator Toby Stavisky, Assemblywoman Ann Margaret Carozza, Past Councilman Mike Able, Citicorp, the Astoria Federal Savings Bank, and the Ridgewood Savings Bank help us close the budget gap. ❖

President's Message

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emergencies happen every day.

The Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT) program is important and we are implementing it at this time. This fall we are working to get as many Whitestone residents as possible signed up for this program. In the event of a disaster, natural or otherwise, our community will have the necessary knowledge to overcome the event and the resources to handle the situation. CERT is sponsored by the Department of Homeland Security and FEMA.

Whitestone Community Volunteer Ambulance Service is a 911-participating agency. This means we have signed agreements with The City of New York for mutual aid, training, and disasters. *However, if you or someone you know needs*

our help you must call us at 718-767-1000 — we cannot be reached by dialing 911.

In addition, ambulance calls, wheel chairs, crutches, walkers, and canes (on loan) are provided at no charge. Many neighboring Corps charge for these services. We can make this offer to our community because our community, in return, supports us financially. Fortunately, our community has not been let down for these past fifty-eight years.

Very soon you'll receive a special mailer asking for your support. Please be generous. Of course, if you'd like to make a gift now, contributions are welcome.

All the best to you and yours.

Respectfully,



Ralph M. Cefalo
President

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WCVAS Mission Statement

Whitestone Volunteer Ambulance Service provides, manages, and maintains, ambulatory services, assisting persons who are infirm, injured, or otherwise disabled in Whitestone, Beechhurst, Malba, Malba Gardens, Robinwood, Beechhurst Allied Manor, and Clearview Gardens, located in the County of Queens, City and state of New York or Post Office Zip Code 11357.