



FIFTY YEARS OF SERVICE... Borough Council President Bruce H. Walsh, center, reads a resolution honoring the Fanwood Volunteer Rescue Squad on its 50th year of service, as members of the squad look on. In background, pictured left to right, are: Captain Jeffrey Downing, President William Crosby, Ruth Wegmann, Sue Davis, Patti Keever and Robert Kruthers. Also present that evening, but not pictured, are squad volunteers Eric Breidenstein, Steve Siegal and John Granelli.

Fanwood Volunteer Rescue Squad Marks 50th Anniversary of Its Charter: 1948-1998

By RUSSELL R. WATKINS
Specially Written for The Times

Every day for 50 years the Fanwood Volunteer Rescue Squad has stood ready to help its friends and neighbors in an emergency.

And although most of the faces have changed since the all-volunteer squad was founded in 1948, the squad's 36 active members still maintain the same level of commitment to their community.

On March 12, the Borough Council honored these dedicated public servants with three resolutions. The first recognized the entire squad for 50 years of dedicated service, while the second and third resolutions hon-

ored squad members Earl Phillips and Ruth Wegmann for their "outstanding dedication and commitment" to the squad and the community.

Council President Bruce H. Walsh praised members for their "professionalism and dedication."

The Fanwood Rescue Squad began operations in 1939 with a single LaSalle ambulance and operated out of the old Fire Hall as a part of the Fanwood Volunteer Fire Company. It was chartered as an independent volunteer force on January 29, 1948. In April of that same year, 30 charter members, including Earl Phillips, elected officers and adopted a Constitution.

John Yarnell was the first President and William Matthews was the first Captain. Then, as now, most of the male members of the squad also served as volunteer fireman.

Over the next 50 years the squad racked up an impressive record of service. It answered its first call for assistance on May 7, 1948, and its 100th in 1949.

In 1977 it relocated to its current 123 Watson Avenue address, which was built with the efforts of squad members. To date the volunteers have answered almost 18,450 calls, 500 alone in 1997. Squad member Susan Davis noted this record is "not bad for a one square mile town."

Most squad members are registered Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs). To obtain EMT status, a squad member must complete 120 hours of specialized training, plus 10 hours of volunteer time in an emergency room, and pass a state-administered written test.

Once these requirements are met, members receive a license valid for three years. During that time they must re-certify their cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) training and supplement their training with additional courses.

Ironically, Ms. Davis cited this as a possible reason why more people do

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not volunteer their time with the squad.

Many, she said, are "put off by the requirements" particularly the 120 hours of specialized training which must be attended in person. However, Ms. Davis noted that the training is not impossible, and can be worked into one's schedule. In fact, she also noted that a typical Rescue Squad member already volunteers their time to another organization.

These commitments can have their rewards. During her 35 years with the squad Ms. Wegmann, affectionately known as the "First Lady" of the Fanwood Rescue Squad, has answered over 2,160 calls, attended 314 meetings and 123 training drills. She has given over 4,600 hours of service to the Fanwood community.

Ms. Wegmann proudly recalls receiving the governors award in 1971 for her efforts in saving a baby who had been thrown from the car in an accident at Terrill Road and Midway Avenue. Although the mother was killed, thanks to Ms. Wegmann and two other squad members' efforts, the baby's life was saved.

Ms. Wegmann commented that such incidents give one an appreciation of life. She recalls that once after she had responded to a call in which a child was hit and killed, she later came across a woman bitterly complaining about her son. With the accident, still fresh in her mind, Ms. Wegmann recalls being so angry that "what I said wasn't even coherent."

Such dramatic incidents are not everyday fare for the members of the Rescue Squad. The organization responds to anyone who calls with a 911 emergency. Ms. Davis estimates that 80 percent of these calls concern medical emergencies such as heart attacks and diabetes attacks.

Members are authorized to give basic life support assistance, and in some cases advanced life support for trauma victims. When not on a call, members perform various tasks.

According to Ms. Davis the squad does not "farm out" any of their maintenance or administrative duties. They wash their own rigs and stuff their own envelopes for their annual fundraiser, which is held every May. No tax dollars go to support the squad. Ms. Davis noted with pride that every time the squad responds to a call it costs only \$70, compared with an average of \$400 a call for communities with a paid Rescue Squad.

For the most part, squad members are pleased with their place in the community. Ms. Wegmann has noticed that, "Fanwood is very concerned about its Rescue Squad."

She also noted some members of the community have, upon the death of a family member, donated money to the Rescue Squad in lieu of flow-

ers. Such donations have allowed the squad to buy several pieces of new equipment in recent years.

Ms. Davis likewise praises the "nice working relationship" the squad has with the borough's police and fire departments.

Also honored at Thursday's ceremony was Mr. Phillips, a lifelong Fanwood resident, former Fanwood police officer, and, of course, a founding member of the Rescue Squad.

During his 50 years with the Rescue Squad, Earl has answered 1,050 calls, attended 280 meetings, and 106 training drills. He has given an estimated 2,400 hours of service to the community. Currently the Chairman of the Building and Grounds Committee, as well as the squad's regular driver, Earl received the honor of "Badge 1" and was recognized as an "extremely loyal and dedicated member."

Because the squad's badge numbers are based on seniority, Earl's "Badge 1" gives him a place of honor on the squad and serves as a visible reminder of all he has shown to the squad, and that the squad has shown to the community.

Like most of the squad, Earl is quiet and unassuming. Ms. Davis described the Rescue Squad as providing a service similar to insurance.

"You don't think about it until you need it," she said.