

# The name of the game is changing for ambulances

By Gary M. Cates  
staff writer

The fire department ambulance many people have grown accustomed to seeing around town is fast becoming a thing of the past.

The changing world of emergency medical care is again turning to the private sector for ambulance service — bringing an end to the era of the municipal ambulance.

"Today there is a push for paramedic service," said Plymouth Fire Chief Roy Hall, formerly with the Redford Fire Department.

"However the high cost of paramedic service is forcing communities to turn to hospitals — it's a trend of the future," Hall said.

**PARAMEDIC SERVICE** means advanced life support (ALS), methods and equipment designed to go beyond the basic emergency medical care provided by most municipal ambulance services.

The difference could mean life or death to a heart-attack victim or severely injured accident victim.

Paramedics can administer drugs, start IVs, interpret EKGs, and perform more sophisticated medical procedures on a patient. The paramedic is in direct

communication with a hospital physician while responding to a call.

Providing ALS with paramedics requires expensive equipment and higher levels of training for personnel, something most communities can't afford.

**ONE EXCEPTION** is the Southfield Fire Department, which operates its own paramedic service (see related story on this page).

Up until about 1968, ambulance service was provided by funeral homes," Hall said.

In 1968 Michigan required ambulance operators to work in pairs and be trained in advanced first aid, he said.

Funeral homes pulled out and fire departments stepped in, since firefighters were trained in advanced first aid and were on-duty around the clock.

Additional legislation evolved into today's requirement that ambulance personnel be certified emergency medical technicians (EMTs). EMTs must complete 140 hours of training.

**"NOW THE PUSH** is for paramedic service. However the cost of this service is almost prohibitive for communities," Hall said.

The average cost for one ALS paramedic unit is \$45,000. The labor costs for manning the unit run between \$70,000 and \$150,000 a year.

Paramedics must complete two years of college medical training and then pass a state board exam. While working as a paramedic, time must be spent in continuing education.

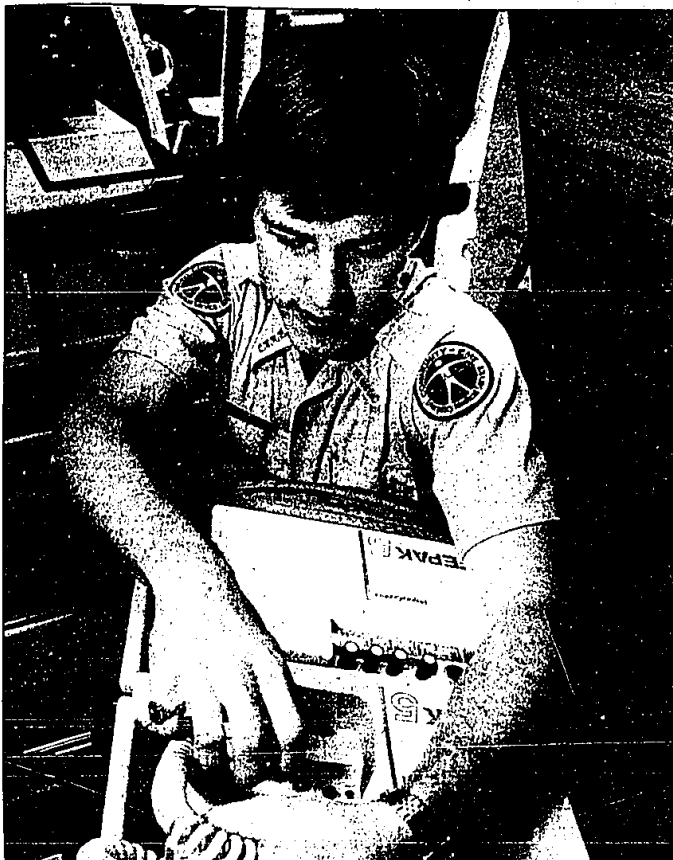
Area hospitals are starting to get into the paramedic act. In the metro area, St. Joseph Hospital in Ann Arbor and Botzard Hospital in Farmington Hills, operate paramedic services.

**THE SERVICE** is offered to municipalities at no cost, other than a working agreement and notification of emergency calls.

"We believe EMS (emergency medical service) and hospitals are natural partners, because EMS units are nothing more than extensions of the hospital's emergency room," said Greg Beauchemin, director of Botzard's Community EMS service.

"There is more credibility with the hospital. The public has a good taste in their mouth when you talk about paramedic service tied into a hospital," he said.

The work and costs of operating a paramedic service are "not practical" for small fire departments and small private ambulance companies, Beauchemin said.



One of the differences between paramedics and emergency medical technicians is the equipment they are allowed to use. Paramedic Jeffery

Cyzman of Community EMS checks the defibrillator which can be used to restart a patient's heart.



At the receiving end of Botzard Hospital's paramedic service is Dr. Ronald Lagerstedt, the chief of emergency services. The doctors are in

radio contact with the paramedics as they work on patients.

## Southfield's the exception

On Nov. 17, 1972, Southfield inaugurated the nation's first paramedic operation in a city with a population of less than 100,000.

In the program's first 10 years, the paramedics were called out on more than 35,000 emergency runs.

Today the paramedics, operating out of four of Southfield's five fire stations, handle about 4,000 medical emergencies each year. Response time to each emergency is four minutes or less.

The Southfield Life Support Unit (LSU) is manned by about 28 paramedics and six sergeant-paramedics, all of whom are members of the Southfield Fire Department. Like other members of the department, they also respond to fires and other non-medical emergencies. The pay range for

the paramedics is \$28,890 to \$31,430. The sergeants receive between \$36,765 to \$37,740

**EVERY PARAMEDIC** receives 560 hours of emergency training, including 480 hours of advanced emergency technician course work. Most training is conducted through Providence Hospital in Southfield. The hospital has been a working partner in the LSU program since the program was first conceived in October 1971.

During its history, the LSU has achieved a number of distinctions. It was a driving force behind the creation of the Michigan Medical Services Act in 1974, legislation which supports formation of paramedic units. In May 1976, the LSU was selected to accompany President Gerald Ford during his tour of southeastern Michigan.



The paramedic ambulance carries an assortment of drugs used to stabilize pa-

tients before transporting. Shown here is an ampule of Demerol, a painkiller.



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