

OEMSCA NEWSLETTER

Athens County EMS faces unique challenges in two-college jurisdiction



ACEMS personnel on the scene of a crash at OU.

For Athens County EMS, having two colleges in its jurisdiction brings a youthful, vibrant atmosphere while also presenting unique challenges.

Chief Rick Callebs, who has held his position since April 2012, said the agency had about 10,000 requests for service last year. The department features 71 employees, of which 42 are full-time. This includes 46 paramedics, 23 EMTs an administrative assistant and a physician medical director. The department has 11 stocked vehicles with either six or seven staffed daily. The agency operates from five different stations across the county in Athens, Coolville, Glouster, Nelsonville and Albany. Callebs said Athens County is unique for many reasons, but one of the major reasons is because of its geographic location.

“We are situated between the Hocking Hills and the Ohio River and are home to two colleges, Ohio University in Athens and Hocking College in Nelsonville,” he said.

One of the bigger challenges includes covering all OU football and basketball games under an exclusive contract. OU is a Division I school, so he said covering a home football game at Peden Stadium represents a big challenge.

“We deploy multiple walking medic crews, a dedicated ambulance and crew for the football teams, ambulances staged outside the venue for transport and a dedicated supervisor to coordinate the event,” he said.

Callebs said the calendar is also full of spring festivals and outdoor concerts that attract thousands. Athens also features the international renowned Athens Halloween Block Party that brings about 20,000 people to the area in late October.

“Our agency partners with the Hocking College EMT and Paramedic training programs to pro-

vide clinical ride-time experience and we have similar relationships with the Ohio University Heritage College of Osteopathic Medicine and the Post-graduate Athletic Training Program,” he said.

“Future physicians ride at our busiest stations alongside the paramedic crews as part of their clinical experience.”

Callebs said Athens County EMS is a busy place to work.

“We average 25-30 calls a day with six trucks,” he said. “We are 9-1-1 only, all advanced life support service, with no long-distance, inter-facility transports. A recent pay raise makes use one of the highest-paid EMS agencies in southeastern Ohio.”

Callebs said he values his department’s membership in the Ohio EMS Chiefs Association.

“Third service EMS never had a unified political voice in state government until OEMSCA was formed,” he said. “It’s great to have a seat at the table on EMS subcommittees and the Ohio EMS, Fire and Medical Transportation Board.”

Callebs said OEMSCA offers various networking opportunities. “If I have a problem, it’s very likely that other EMS chiefs have experienced the same issue and can offer advice and counseling,” he said. “We share policies, goals, ideas, bid specs and other technical and operational data that keeps everyone from reinventing the wheel.” A lot of friendships have developed through OEMSCA membership, because, at the end of the day, we’re all EMS people who chose this unique career path. That’s common ground for enjoying a cup of coffee or eating breakfast together and just catching up.”

Callebs said EMS billing, recruiting and retaining quality employees and the abuse and misuse of the EMS system are among the key issues Ohio EMS departments are dealing with. He said his fa-

vorite part of the job is helping new employees grow into the job. “I also enjoy working with other agencies on large special events, trying to be at the forefront on the latest developments with new equipment, working on our (soon to be built) new Athens EMS station and central administration offices and developing five and ten-year goals for our office.” Callebs said new products and technology are helpful but said some of the best and newest equipment tends to be “horribly expensive.”

“Third-service EMS agencies do not usually qualify for the bulk of the federal grant money that is routinely given to fire departments,” he said. “Budget issues prevent us from

jumping on every new thing that comes along.” Callebs said he is pleased with how things are

going, but he said it’s important to continue to improve and to keep long-term goals in mind.

“I would like to get our new Athens EMS station and administrative office complex built and operational. This is a \$2.2 million project that includes a larger training room, bay space for eight ambulances, individual bunk rooms for EMS crews and an administrative office area that will consolidate three facilities into one,” he said. “We are hoping to be operational in the summer of 2020.”

Callebs said the department has a strong preventative maintenance program that regularly replaces front-line ambulances.

“This needs to continue,” he said. “We did a fleet-wide Stryker power-load conversion in 2013 and have the power load cots and trolley system along with the Stryker stair chairs. I’d highly recommend that to all departments.”

Callebs also said he hopes to purchase additional equipment and convert the workforce over to all full-time.

“We also hope to construct a sixth EMS station east of Athens along US 50,” he said, adding that no timeline has been implemented for the goal.



Rick Callebs

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DeWine appoints Jeff Jackson to state board

Gov. Mike DeWine announced several appointments Aug. 16, including that of Sandusky County EMS Chief Jeff Jackson to the State Board of Emergency Medical, Fire, and Transportation Services.

Jackson is to be the Ohio EMS Chiefs Association representative on the board.

"I was very honored just to be nominated by OEMSCA," he said. "To be appointed my Governor DeWine has me speechless."

Jackson said OEMSCA and its members have worked very hard to get where it is today.

"My goal will be to continue the hard work for the third-service EMS agencies in make sure we have a voice at this level," he said.

Jackson said he will attend board meetings every other month and will attend

committee meetings periodically.

"I feel I bring 20-plus years of knowledge and experience of being involved in a third-service EMS environment," he said of his contribution to the board.

The EMFTS board is responsible for several things, including the accreditation of EMS training programs, the approval of EMS continuing education sites, the oversight of Ohio's trauma system, the oversight of the EMS grant program and the licensing of Ohio's medical transportation services.

The board consists of 21 members, 20 appointed by the governor and one appointed by the director of the Ohio Department of Public Safety. The appointees to the board represent Ohio's fire and emergency medical services, private medical transportation services, mobile intensive care provid-

ers, air medical providers, trauma programs, hospitals, emergency physicians, EMS training programs and the Ohio Department of Public Safety.

OEMSCA President Vince Gildone was excited to hear the news of Jackson's appointment.

"I have known Chief Jackson for some time and I have nothing but positive things to say about him," Gildone said. "Jeff has a thorough understanding of EMS and its needs and he will be an excellent representative for the Ohio EMS Chiefs, and will be an asset to the state EMFTS board."



Jeff Jackson

It has to stop, before there's no one left to answer the call

Is the Thin White Line cracking? A VA paramedic's perspective

Scott Grant, a paramedic from the state of Virginia, put together this powerful, yet troubling post on Facebook in April about the future of EMS careers.

Imagine if you needed an ambulance and this is all you got. A box on wheels full of equipment and medications to save your life, but no one there to use it. EMS is in trouble and people don't seem to notice and/or care.

Every day I sign on to my social media accounts I see new news stories being posted on the EMS pages that I follow about workers leaving the EMS profession in droves.

As I read through the comments sections on these stories I tend to see a similar theme: poor wages, poor benefits, ridiculous expectations for hours worked, and management teams that don't care about their employees.

The national average salary for an EMS provider is \$33,000 according to the BLS.

\$33,000!!!!

The local car wash has a billboard posted advertising \$40,000 for management positions! AT THE CAR WASH!

The mayor of New York City recently made headlines as he tried to justify why EMS providers there didn't need pay comparable to those in the fire service and law enforcement. "It's a different kind of work," he said. Ya think?!

Approximately 90% of the nation's 911

EMS providers are non-fire based services. This means that they are county-run services, private services, or hospital-based services. A lot of them are not unionized and don't have the same perks as fire and law enforcement agencies. Wages tend to be the biggest problem.

Most EMS workers have to work A LOT of overtime just to make a living, or work more than one job. Do you really want someone who's been on for 48 hours or has been juggling 2-3 jobs making life-or-death decisions at 3AM? I'm lucky enough to work for a service that pays decent wages but there are services not too far from here where medics are making \$13-\$15/hr. Do you know what it takes to be a paramedic??

First, you have to go to EMT school. Then you have to go to paramedic school. And depending on how you go to paramedic school that can be from 1-4 years worth of education (certification-only vs. associate's degree program vs. bachelor's degree program). They are trained in advanced life support skills including advanced airway management, cardiology, pharmacology, and even some surgical skills.

Paramedics and EMTs are out there bringing an aspect of the emergency department to the patient's doorstep.

They assess patients, make treatment plans, administer medications, mix

medication drips and place on infusion pumps, infuse blood, place people into medically-induced comas to take over their airways, place them on ventilators, place chest tubes, perform pericardiocentesis, perform surgical cricothyrotomies, and the list goes on. And they do it for \$33,000/year! Are you kidding me?!

And so what happens?

You lose experienced medics to higher-paying professions like nursing.

Which leaves the patients on the streets without that experienced healthcare provider to bring that care to their doorstep.

I've personally known several GREAT paramedics who've left the industry because they had to just to be able to make more money to support their families.

And like I said, every single day there's a new story from somewhere in the country where something like this is happening. Entire services have shut down which then adds strain to neighboring services left to pick up the slack. One comment even said "EMS is a dying profession."

Everyone knows about The Thin Red Line and The Thin Blue Line. Did you know EMS is The Thin White Line? And right now, that line is cracking across this country, and at some point it has to stop.

Before there's no one there to answer the call.

Free training event in Delaware County!

"The Warrior Within" training event is to occur from 8 a.m.-3:30 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 5 at Olentangy Berlin H.S., 3140 Berlin Station Rd. Delaware, OH. The program features two powerful presenters, Army veteran and motivational speaker Dan Nevins will lead first responders through a mental and physical session, challenging you to sweat, think and relax. Retired Highway Patrol Lt. Steve Click, who is now with Ohio Mental Health and Addiction Services, will share why and how mental resiliency improves/saves lives. This workshop is free and lunch can be purchased. Register by Sept. 15, you can register online here <https://sheriff.co.delaware.oh.us/the-warrior-within/>.

