

OEMSCA NEWSLETTER

Athens County EMS providers always ready for SE Ohio's premier event



By Athens County EMS Chief Rick Callebs

For most people, Halloween is a signature late October event that means kids dressed up in a variety of costumes, going door to door for “trick-or-treat” or “Beggar’s night”, depending on the vernacular where you live.

In Athens County, Halloween is something different. It’s the single largest special event in the region and perhaps all of southeastern Ohio. The Athens Halloween Block Party, taking place on the streets of uptown Athens, is an internationally known event that can bring upwards of 20,000 people to our area for the weekend. Hotel rooms are booked several years in advance, student housing turns into an impromptu bed and breakfast for as many people as you can fit in the building, and alcohol is purchased by the keg and the case.

The party, an annual event since 1974, involves large numbers of (mainly) college students who dress in costume, walk the uptown streets, drink alcohol, visit with and make new friends, go to the bars, attend house parties, and repeat until you are arrested, you are taken to the hospital by EMS, or the event is over. Fortunately, most partygoers choose the third option and simply enjoy a fun weekend with friends. EMS must plan for the others.

Athens County EMS operations at the Block Party involve four areas of specialization. We have six dedicated ALS ground transport vehicles with extra staffing to manage patients who require medical treatment and transportation. We have several “quick response” teams that carry backpacks and can move quickly through the crowd, locating, assessing, and treating patients, and coordinating transport with EMS vehicle crews when necessary. It is not uncommon to escort or physically carry patients to a waiting ambulance a block away due to crowd congestion.

The third element is a self-contained communications center that monitors the status and whereabouts of every EMS employee working the event, along with dedicated event ambulances and the EMS vehicles at our outlying stations that may need to be called into Athens when resources on Court Street are depleted. The communications center also serves as a warming station for our crews, giving them a place to sit down, drink coffee, and finish ePCR run reports. We also have first aid supplies available for the partygoer who needs a Band-Aid or has a minor medical issue. The quick response teams are based at

the communications center and normally handle these minor issues.

The final element is the Command. Each area of the operation is overseen by an Assistant Chief and there are designated leaders for each ambulance and response team. The EMS Chief provides a second level of oversight and coordinates with law enforcement, fire, 9-1-1, city and university officials as the event progresses. Recent Halloween Block Parties have been relatively tame, but several past celebrations were marred by unruly crowds, throwing bricks and beer bottles at responding emergency vehicles, gunshots in the crowd, overcrowded bars, and a structure fire on the outer perimeter.

All agencies establish a secured unified command center in City Hall at the beginning of the event, bringing together political leaders and department heads along with a dedicated PIO to handle media requests, especially if the event takes a turn for the worse.

Preparation for Halloween is a year-round process, with planning meetings starting in late summer. Event security is a priority, and over 100 law enforcement officers from across the state are hired for the weekend. K9 officers, mounted (horse) units, bomb-sniffing dogs, the Highway Patrol’s Special Response (Riot) Teams, undercover liquor control officers, city fire officials, and the Ohio Fire Marshal’s office complement local law enforcement officers from the city of Athens, Ohio University, and the Athens County Sheriff’s Office. The goal is to make the event as safe as possible.

We are fortunate that our only hospital is one mile from Court Street, the epicenter of the event. The 20 bed ER normally swells to capacity during the Block Party and extra staff, including physicians, are scheduled to address the influx. Radio rooms at the Athens PD and Ohio University PD are double staffed for the night. Athens County 9-1-1 brings in extra telecommunicators, providing a dedicated dispatcher to coordinate countywide ambulance dispatch with the needs of our special event communications center. Our county health department and Emergency Management Agency are on standby with additional resources if needed.

Our operations division utilizes the event to practice incident command and triage. We utilize triage tags and a transportation officer to provide a running total on patient treatment and EMS runs for the event. As with any outdoor event, the weather

is an issue, especially in late October. We’ve had Halloween Block Parties with temperatures in the low 70s and wall-to-wall crowds, and the next year we have 31-degree temperatures and snow flurries at 1:00 am, several hours before the event winds down. Our triage area does contain a warming station if needed, and EMS crews have treated and transported injured, unconscious, intoxicated, hypothermic patients from the event in previous years. As we move into the 46th year of Ath-



ens Halloween, local leaders are trying to slowly add more family-oriented events early in the day as well as shutting the event down before midnight, a huge change from several years ago when the 2:30 am bar closing time signaled the unofficial end to the weekend’s festivities. In an abundance of caution, EMS and other public safety forces will remain on hand after the event closes in case an “after-party” occurs at the campus bars or in off-campus residential housing.

The city and university have worked in unison to “change the trajectory” of Block Party from a wild, drunken street party to a safer event by promoting responsible behavior while still having fun. The number of EMS calls and arrests by law enforcement have declined in the past five years. In 2018, EMS crews responded to 23 requests for service during the event. By comparison, we handled 68 calls during the same time period in 2012. The 2019 event will employ a professional promoter who is marketing the event with live bands, multiple stages, a beer garden, and the family-friendly offerings earlier in the day. From an EMS perspective, we welcome and support the change but will continue to staff the event “with an abundance of caution” for what COULD go wrong. If it happens, we are ready.

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From volunteer to chief, Burns continues to lead Tri-Village Rescue Services

Chief Eric Burns, of Tri-Village Rescue Services, has risen from a volunteer to his current position to help lead his department into the future.

Burns said he started his EMS career in 1988 as a volunteer EMT while he was in college working on a degree in environmental health and safety.

"I also was able to take my paramedic class in the evening through one of the hospitals in the area," he said.

Burns worked in the private sector as a human resources manager while continuing to volunteer as a paramedic with Tri-Village during the weekends. In 2002, the trustees of Tri-Village decided it was time to hire a full-time chief and Burns was given the role.

Burns said his agency averages 450-500 calls annually, while covering a 120-square-mile area across four villages (New Madison, Palestine, Hollansburg and Wayne Lakes). The townships of Harrison, Neave, Butler and Liberty also are covered by the department.

The agency employs 24 part-timers, including seven paramedics and 17 EMTs. Burns is the only full-time employee of the department. Tri-Village runs two Advanced Life Support ambulances, a special operations vehicle and a staff vehicle.

Over Burns' experience in EMS, he said his favorite part has been working hands-on to assist patients.

"I've always loved patient care, ever since I

started in EMS," he said. "When people call 911, they are having a bad day, and we as EMS professionals need to remember that we are being given a lot of trust by these people to help them. We are given very personal information and we see parts of their lives that they don't show just anyone. I feel as an EMS professional, I need to respect that patient and share their concern for their health."

Burns said one of his favorite types of calls is to help the elderly, especially veterans.

"One veteran, even at 93-years-old he can remember each of the names of the soldiers he lost," He said. "All of our patients deserve the best care."

Burns said the most challenging part of his job is staffing.

"About 10 years ago, we had tons of people, but today, departments are struggling to fill their schedules," he said. "We have to compete with other departments to keep staff and young people aren't going into our field because of the education requirements and the pay. Let's face it, people can find other jobs that more than EMS does without all the stress, long hours and low pay."

Burns said he is proud his agency is a member of the Ohio EMS Chiefs Association because of the networking opportunity.

"It has opened multiple doors for me and given me the opportunity to see how other organizations are run," he said. "I have become more involved in the politics of



EMS since joining OEMSCA."

Burns sits on three different state committees and said he has enjoyed meeting EMS chiefs and administrators across the state.

"I think the relationships that we build at our organizational meetings as well as at our annual conference are invaluable," he said.

"I hope that our organization keeps growing and we become as active as the Ohio Fire Chiefs organization. I hope we become a leader on EMS legislation in Ohio, making our voices heard on the national level as well. I feel the more we work at getting legislation passed, the more our occupation will be recognized, and our organization will be recognized as one that makes positive changes for Ohio EMS."

Burns said new products and technology are important in improving the capability of himself and his staff.

"Doing 12 leads in the field was never thought of when I went to paramedic school back in 1989," he said. "Or having a camera at the end of the intubation blades to show your location, these are things that make our jobs so much easier."

Burns said he greatly appreciates the dedication and hard work put forth by his staff.

"We are a small farming community and we do rely a lot on the local providers to keep back-up ambulances staffed," he said. "My staff is also great at working within our community, showing pride in working with Tri-Village Rescue Services. We are the only department with a dedicated vehicle for mass casualty and fire rehab in our county."

Burns said the department is very accommodating to civic organizations, including by allowing them to use the agency's conference center.

"Our policy is that we are nothing without our community behind us," he said. "We are very frugal, and we do what we can to improve our building and keep up with maintenance to our equipment to save taxpayer dollars."

Burns said he's proud of his team.



EMT Megan Garno Received the "Member of the year"

OEMSCA Conference and Legislative Meet and Greet Nov. 12

The Ohio EMS Chiefs Association Conference is Nov. 12 at the Nationwide Hotel and Conference Center, 100 Green Meadows South in Lewis Center, OH. The conference is from 8 a.m.-5 p.m. and it will be immediately followed by a Legislative Meet and Greet from 5-7 p.m. Several talented speakers and presenters will be featured at the conference. If you have not yet registered for the conference, please do so by Nov. 1! Here is a link to that information

<http://oemsc.org/meetings/>.
The agenda for the conference is below!
• 0700-0800 Registration and Breakfast
• 0800-0900 "The Moment of Impact" Dr. Mike Peterson, D.O., FACEP
• 0900-1000 "EMS Today—Have We Lost Service Orientation?" David Glendenning- Presenter
• 1000-1100 "Therapy Dog Program" Debbie Willis- Presenter
• 1100-1130 Break and Vendor Time

- 1130– 1215 "EMS Dashboard" Rob Wagoner– Deputy Director ODPS
- 1215– 1300 Lunch and Networking
- 1300– 1400 "Global Thinking" Ned Parks– Presenter
- 1400–1600 "Wingman Leadership Seminar" Lt. Col. Scott "Hurler" Weaver
- 1600– 1630 Vendor Visits
- 1630 Wrap Up