

EMS satellite stations: Cliff-Gila Region

Gila Regional Medical Center offers emergency medical services to the community and ambulances can be seen traveling the streets of Silver City and down the highway to other venues.

Did you know that not only Silver City-based units answer calls for help?

GRMC has three satellite EMS groups that travel the roadways in the less-populated areas around Cliff, Sapillo and the Mimbres Valley.

May is Emergency Medical Services Awareness Month. And these three will be featured in a series about what these volunteer groups do.

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The Gila Valley EMS, with its ambulance housed at the Cliff-Gila Fire Department across the road from the Cliff School, was started in 1968, with about 10 people.

“Although the EMS is separate from the fire department, we work closely, and well, together,” Gila Valley EMS Chief B.J. Agnew said.

The group received its first ambulance from Gila Regional Medical Center in 1987. The ambulance, maintained by GRMC, is equipped to paramedic level, with supplies being provided by GRMC.

“Gila Regional is very supportive of our association,” Agnew said.

The volunteers cover a wide-ranging area. It encompasses the land between the 100-Mile Marker on U.S. 180 at the Mangus Valley Road to the Grant County line on U.S. 180 toward Glenwood. They also cover New Mexico 78 — the Mule Creek Road to the state line.

According to Agnew, “the Glenwood EMS can get to the county line quicker than we can,” but both groups answer the calls.

“We cover Cliff, Gila, Buckhorn, Mule Creek, Riverside and the Mangus Valley,” Agnew said. “We also cover the ‘Box,’ Bill Evans (Lake area), lower Bear Creek area, and the Turkey Creek area. It’s a large area.”

The volunteers number 15 and include four paramedics, with three from Gila Regional and one Border Patrol paramedic. Three of the members are intermediate level and the rest have attained basic level certification. Most of the volunteers live in and around Cliff and Gila, with two in Buckhorn and one in Mule Creek.

“We have rotating teams just on weekends,” Agnew said. “The paramedics are not on the weekend list as they are often working in Silver City.”

During the week, and often on weekends, anybody that is available will check in by radio and monitor the call to see if help is needed.

“Usually we have three people respond to medical calls, and sometimes extra help shows up in their personal vehicles to help get the patient packaged and loaded,” Agnew said. “Under some circumstances, such as chest pain, we will call for a paramedic intercept.”

Although the group has a phone number list to contact members, each volunteer has a radio and usually monitors the Med Channel.

“We have a repeater on a hill near Bill Evans Lake that gives us good coverage,” Agnew said. “Right now, we are averaging about eight runs a month, but it seems that calls run in threes. We will go a couple of weeks with no calls at all, and then there will be three or four calls in four or five days.”

He said that 99 percent of the time the volunteers are paged over their radios from Central Dispatch. Less than 1 percent of the time will a member get a call at home asking for an ambulance.

The association receives a small amount of funding from the state of New Mexico, mostly used for keeping current on skills and licensures.

“We also use these funds for small equipment purchases,” Agnew said.

Most calls result in transporting the patient or accident victim to Gila Regional. Some refuse treatment or transportation. In that case, Agnew said they are required to sign a “refusal form,” and “we cancel the call.”

“We usually don’t call for a helicopter,” Agnew said. “However, recently we responded, with Glenwood EMS, to a one-car rollover, and our paramedic intercept called for a helicopter. It was a good call.”

“Being an EMS Volunteer requires commitment and a willingness to meet the challenges of saving lives and caring for people in our community in times of crisis,” said Don McNutt, Gila Regional EMS Director.

A first anniversary celebration, reception and open house of the 10,000 square foot EMS facility at Gila Regional will be held at 9 a.m. on May 14, 2010. The building includes a state-of-the-art training center where volunteers can train and perfect their skills.

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Photo by Mary Alice Murphy is of the Gila/Cliff Station