

50 years of emergency services: Weston EMS - How it all began

Written by Susan Jordan, Weston EMS
Friday, 30 March 2012 00:00

This year is the 50th anniversary of Weston Volunteer EMS. We thought it would be a good time to share the history of how Weston VEMS began.

This history was told by Joe Spetly, a member of the Weston Volunteer Fire Department and a former member of Weston VEMS, at a recent meeting.

Before 1963, the town of Weston depended on Westport for ambulance service. The Westport ambulance was operated by a Westport fireman — if he wasn't on a fire call. He often had his daughter as his assistant — if the daughter wasn't in school.

If the Westport fireman went on an ambulance call that required assistance with lifting the stretcher, he would flag down a passing car and ask for help to load the patient. This was better than nothing ... but not by much. But those were the times that prevailed.

At a Weston Town Meeting in the early 1960s, someone asked why Weston didn't have its own ambulance service. The person asking the question went on to say that often it took several calls and 45 to 60 minutes to obtain an ambulance from the Westport fireman.

But the Weston selectmen answered that there were no town funds available for an emergency medical service.

Alex Butman and Fred Moore, members of the Weston Fire Department, didn't like that answer. They formed a committee to look into what it would involve to start a first-aid squad in Weston.

Within two weeks, the committee recommended an inexpensive vehicle be purchased to function as an ambulance and that the Fire Department manage it.

An ambulance committee was formed to operate the ambulance with Alex Butman as chairman.

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The fund-raising committee was headed by Clarence Sturgis and letters were sent to everyone in town. Other fund-raisers were a turkey shoot and baseball games between the Fire Department and Weston school teachers.

Soon, Alex Butman started a class for 13 firemen who volunteered to become members of the Weston First-Aid Squad.

Three months later, on June 20, 1962, the newly formed first aid squad purchased a specially converted International Harvester, complete with a stick shift. The 13 firemen first-aiders were ready to go!

In those early days, being on duty meant sitting at home by your phone. There were no two-way radios like today.

All emergency calls were directed to an answering service in Westport run by a woman named Sylvia, and she would call you at home with the information on where you were to go. If Sylvia couldn't track you down, she called Westport Fire Department and they would blow the siren once, indicating an ambulance call that needed to be answered.

Using radios at home to just receive calls and eventually having two-way radios like today were a long time in the future. But that's the way it was in the early 1960s when Weston VEMS was born.