

Letter to the Editor

Emergency Services

Submitted by George "Jody" Sweeney

Incumbent for 5th District Levy Court

A recent letter to the editor concerning Emergency Preparedness in Kent County was informative. It went to great lengths to point out the great work that Kent County has done to make sure that our Paramedics and Emergency Response was the best in the Country. While the writer pointed out some deficiencies, such as the 911 Center War Room, this building is not the central location for emergencies in Delaware, which would be the \$30million DEMA Center north of Smyrna. I am proud to have been part of this work for the last eight years.

We do have some challenges with the Paramedic and Emergency Services under the Public Safety Division, but they are manageable. Let me explain.

We do not have a problem with the skills and abilities of our Paramedics and support employees. They are very well trained, and training is provided for all employees from dispatchers to the paramedics.

We do not have a problem with our response times. Response times over the last 12 years has decreased from an average of 10 minutes to 8 minutes. That is an additional 2 minutes that can save someone who is in life-threatening distress. This improvement has been despite a 55% increase in EMS calls to the 9-1-1 Center. Last year, there were more than 28,000 calls to the center.

We do not have a problem with management. Chief Colin Faulkner, Director of Public Safety for Kent County, manages a department that runs like a well-oiled machine. He has formed partnerships with nearly every emergency organization in the State, from municipalities to the Federal Government and the Dover Air Force Base, hospitals and other private agencies/businesses, and our great volunteer fire companies. He is included in nearly every level of Emergency Planning, including the Kent County Emergency Operations Plan, the Delaware Emergency Operations Plan, the Radiological Emergency Plan, Weapons of Mass Destruction Plan, Floods Hazards, and many others. Under Chief Faulkner's leadership, the Division was 6th in the World and 1st in Delaware to achieve accreditation as an Emergency Fire Dispatch Center, and also received the American Heart Association 2015 Mission Lifeline EMS Stemi Quality Achievement Award. Chief Faulkner plans each year for equipment replacements from AED devices to new emergency vehicles. The successful functioning of this equipment is necessary when responding to train wrecks, hurricanes like Sandy, and tropical storms like Charlie, that caused a tornado in Wyoming. But those events are exceptional, it is the annual presence of EMS at events like Firefly, bike tours, parades, festivals, and the Dover Downs races that show how our EMS stand out.

Our challenges are in two areas. The first is funding. In 2009, the State paid for 70% of the Paramedic program and the County paid 30%. In 2016, the State now only covers 30% of that funding. Check your tax bill to see how much your Property Taxes went up during this time. The Public Safety budget is about 33% of the County Operational Budget. Any additional funding adjustment by the State is going to hurt deeply.

The second area is personnel. We have the best employees in the State working for Emergency Services. From Dispatchers to Paramedics, we recruit from the Delaware Technical Community College Paramedic program, train, and then lose some to other counties or jurisdictions for better pay. We have to address this issue to keep these employees.

Throughout the writer's letter, no mention was made of one of the most important emergency services in the County: Our volunteer fire companies. Since 2008, Kent County has increased funding to our 19 companies and ambulance services by 115%. Again check your bill, no tax increases for this. And working with the Kent County Volunteer Firefighters Association, new funding rules provide more funding for those companies who have more homes in their district, have more calls, or go out of district to assist other companies. On October 19th, checks will be handed out to these companies, totaling some \$815,000. I wish it was more, it will never be enough for what they do.

So, "Could it happen here?" The obvious answer is yes, and Kent County Emergency Services is prepared.