

putting the spotlight on EMS

New York City uses EMS Week to promote public awareness

By Jenifer Goodwin

New York City's Fire Department (FDNY) is the nation's largest and probably best known. Its 11,000 firefighters are frequently in the news or profiled in movies and TV shows; tales of their heroism on 9/11 have been recounted around the globe.

What the public is less aware of is another critical component of the FDNY—the 3,300 EMTs and paramedics who make up the Bureau of Emergency Medical Service, or FDNY EMS. Created in 1996 when the New York City Health and Hospitals Corporation merged with the FDNY, the Bureau of EMS is the nation's largest municipal EMS agency, responding to 1.4 million calls annually.

"If you ask people what EMTs and paramedics do, most people will say, 'Oh, the ambulance drivers?'" says Ross Terranova, FDNY EMS division chief. "There isn't a definitive understanding as to the role of the EMT and paramedic in the 911 system ... We know what our mission is within the fire department, but the problem we find is that the public doesn't always know it."

To raise awareness about the critical role FDNY EMS plays in the community, Terranova and his team

create an annual marketing campaign and host a series of events each year, all based around EMS Week. Events run the gamut from the dramatic — lighting the Empire State Building in EMS colors — to the heartwarming — the Second Chance Brunch, which brings together sudden cardiac arrest survivors with their EMS rescuers. "It's a very emotional time for our responders," Terranova says about the brunch. "They get to sit and talk with the people they did CPR on. It's pretty incredible. It validates what we do for a living."

One event that always draws a crowd is the annual EMT and Paramedic Competition & Health Fair, which pits teams representing each of the five boroughs against one another in elaborately staged simulations, complete with smoke machines and an announcer to keep the crowd posted on the action.

In the months leading up to the event, 35 teams from Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, Staten Island and the Bronx compete within their division to represent their borough in the finals. The finals are held in the Metrotech Commons, a large spacious courtyard



EMS colors light up New York City's Empire State Building for EMS Week 2012.

outside the FDNY headquarters in Brooklyn, during EMS Week.

On game day, 11 teams (five Basic Life Support, five Advanced Life Support and one team of EMTs who work in emergency medical dispatch) are kept in seclusion until it's their turn, so no one knows what to expect in advance. A panel of judges, made up of physicians and EMS instructors from the FDNY's Office of Medical Affairs, rates each team's ability to think on their feet, assess complicated situations, make use of new equipment and procedures, and to communicate.

In 2012, the scenario involved tandem parachute jumpers who had veered off course and landed on a car on a highway. One jumper died; the other had traumatic injuries. The passengers in the vehicle were a man and his pregnant wife — who went into labor.

In 2011, the scenario was a two-car accident caused by an overheated vehicle. That driver had opened his radiator cap and burned his face — he also happened to have a hostage inside his trunk. Inside the other vehicle, the passenger was wearing a left ventricu-



New York City unveils their EMS poster for 2012.

lar assist device (LVAD) and was on the way to the hospital.

“We wanted to challenge the crews to see if they would recognize an LVAD and would know what to do,” Terranova says. “In this case, the LVAD patient was actually fine. The patient that really needed help was the guy who had burned his face. We also wanted to see if they did a good scene survey and could figure out there was a person banging on the trunk. Some teams did; others missed it.”

During the event, the public can meet the crews, tour specialty vehicles and learn compression-only CPR. Participants are sent off with a mannequin and an instructional video, and are encouraged to teach someone else. They also are given a key fob, which includes a code and a web address

that they can use to notify the FDNY if they actually end up doing CPR. “We’ve had several people get back to us and register that they did CPR after the training,” Terranova says. “We suspect there are others, but not everybody has told us about it.”

Other EMS Week highlights include:

- The EMS Recognition Mass, in which parishioners at a Brooklyn church offer a special prayer for pre-hospital providers.
- The lighting of the Empire State Building in blue (for the Star of Life), white (for the FDNY EMS Patch) and yellow (for the state EMS patch.)
- A commemorative pin and duffle bag personalized with each station’s

logo, sponsored by the nonprofit FDNY Foundation, is given to all EMS employees.

- A photo competition, which challenges EMS employees to shoot a photo that depicts what their jobs mean to them. To protect patient privacy and ensure safety, photos cannot be taken while responding to a call, while on duty, or of actual patients. Last year’s winning photo depicted a paramedic’s hands writing on a unit activity log. Instead of writing about the day’s call activity, the medic had written a “bucket list” that included crossed-off accomplishments such as “sky dive,” “run a marathon” and “make a difference.”

The EMS Week theme in 2012 was

“More than a job. A calling.” Terranova says, “We asked people what that meant to them, and I was overwhelmed by the response.”

One of Terranova’s favorite aspects of EMS Week is creating their annual EMS poster. The 2012 poster featured a striking image of a paramedic with his head bent, stethoscope hung around his neck, gripping his gear bags against a backdrop of the city at night. The paramedic featured is Don Faeth, a 25-year EMS veteran. “This kind of job isn’t for everybody,” Faeth says in a video about the making of the poster. “The work that our emergency medical technicians and paramedics do every day puts them in touch with realities of life most people don’t want to be associated with.”

The FDNY places 500 posters in phone booths, concentrating them in neighborhoods responsible for a lot of 911 calls to help educate the public about the proper use of 911, Terranova says.

To create the poster and other EMS Week events, Terranova worked with a team of experts from elsewhere in the department, including graphic designers, public information officers, and staff from operations, training and recruitment. Collaboration is key to EMS Week’s success, he says.

“EMS people are humble people. They are used to being in the background,” Terranova says. “This is an opportunity for them to be proud of their accomplishments and to be acknowledged for the work they do.”

Jenifer Goodwin is a journalist specializing in EMS and is the associate editor of the newsletter Best Practices in Emergency Services.

Acknowledgment: The photos used in this story are courtesy of the New York Fire Department Bureau of EMS and are used with their permission. We appreciate the assistance of EMS Division Chief Ross Terranova.

Inspired by New York?

National EMS Week is the perfect opportunity to showcase EMS and bring awareness to the public and medical providers and to recognize your EMS personnel.

Here are a handful of easy things you can do to recognize EMS staff and promote your contributions:

- » Provide a meal for crews on shift; sponsor giveaways (shirts, bags, pins) or awards; offer reimbursements for educational opportunities.
- » Talk with restaurants or movie theaters in your area to see if discounts can be given to EMS personnel during EMS Week.
- » Invite an elected official on a ride-along, giving them a firsthand experience of what you do.
- » Hold an event to honor in-the-line-of-duty deaths.
- » Hold a luncheon or dinner to allow survivors and first responders to meet
- » Use your website and social media (Facebook, Twitter) to promote your EMS Week activities.
- » Partner with a local hospital or medical center to conduct a community outreach event such as a health fair.

May 22 is “EMS for Children Day”

Here’s a fun idea from Charles County, Maryland!

Every year during EMS Week, a day is set aside to promote awareness in children. For several years the Charles County (Md.) Department of Emergency Services, EMS Division, and the county’s Association of EMS have hosted an especially innovative way to celebrate that day — a “Teddy Bear Clinic.” Children are invited to bring their sick or injured teddy bears to meet and be evaluated by EMS team members. The team helps educate the kids on safety and health issues and then fix their favorite furry friend with special care! This event is a big hit in the community and a fun way to educate children and families.



Charles County, Maryland, EMS team members connect with kids through a unique clinic.