FRONT LINE

A salute to community volunteer first responders • 2024

ANTIQUE VEHICLE

Beyond the call:

volunteering with a community rescue squad extends beyond 911 emergencies

Members of Mid-County Volunteer Rescue Squad load supplies for transport to Ukraine.
Photo by Lisa Hinton-Valdrighi

Camp Rescue, hosted by Middlesex County Volunteer Rescue Squad, is a free camp for ages 8-12 introducing youth to various service units and how they help the community.

by Lisa Hinton-Valdrighi

Volunteering as an emergency medical responder is mentally and physically challenging and often means assisting people during the worst moments of their lives, be it a health-related emergency like a heart attack or stroke or rushing to their aid during a car crash.

But beyond that 911 call, rescue squad volunteers are also stewards of the community, quietly present where there are large gatherings of people like sporting events and festivals, offering free life-saving training courses and in some cases, even feeding the needy or elderly. Their service goes beyond that emergency call.

"I've never seen such a dedicated group. They are really hard-core dedicated people," said Tina Mennett with the **Middlesex County Volunteer Rescue Squad.** "It never ceases to amaze me, all they want to do. That's why I decided to [volunteer]."

Middlesex County Volunteer Rescue Squad (MCVRS) covers all of Middlesex County with a squad building in Urbanna and the main building in Deltaville.

The squad accomplishes a lot with its 20 active members. Mennett is an associate member and chairs the Rescue Regatta, which she says "is filling the gap that was left behind by the leukemia cup. Last year was successful and this year should be even bigger. It's a two-day, family-friendly event, really a festival. Not only are we raising money for the rescue squad, but we're putting good family fun out there."

Last August, the squad held its first Rescue Regatta—a weekend-long event which drew about 200 guests each evening and 35 racers. Plans are already in the works for a bigger event July 12-13.

Middlesex's volunteer squad seems ever present in the community, offering and assisting with events year round, from coordinating the volunteers for standby at the annual two-day Urbanna Oyster Festival to hosting CPR training courses.

"If anybody calls up and says they are having an event, like the Polar Plunge, we will try our best to be there," said Mennett.

Wings, Wheels & Keels, football games, trunk-or-treat events, Chesapeake Croquet Club tournaments and Groovin' in the Park concerts are among the events where the squad is present. They also assist with several blood drives a year, the most recent of which was January 9.

"For the blood drives, we turn the building over for the event," said Mennett. "Seems like a small thing but it involves volunteers coming down to meet them and help with the setup and breakdown.

"It's a great building [in Deltaville] and we try to put it to good use. We open it to the public as often as we can," she added.

Each year, the building is the site of Camp Rescue, a one-day, free camp for ages 8-12 introducing them to multiple service agencies such as LifeEvac, U.S. Coast Guard Milford Haven, Virginia State Police K-9 unit, the Middlesex County Sheriff's Office and the Lower Middlesex Volunteer Fire Department.

"The objective is to create a great learning space for the kids and to demonstrate what each service does and how they help the community," said Mennett.

The building is also where the squad hosts CPR and EMT recertification training to the community. The classes are free.

The squad also hopes to institute a Community Paramedicine/Mobile Integrated Healthcare for the county. It's a program offering non-emergency assistance to those in the community in need. For instance, said Mennett, "there are people our paramedics and EMTs know need help, just with things like checking vitals. Often they call us for an emergency visit when really what they need is a welfare check. It's something we're going to put to the membership for feedback and hopefully start."

In Lancaster County, Capt. Teresa Rock with **Upper Lancaster Volunteer Rescue Squad** (ULVRS) said the 10 active members in her squad serve often as "standby" at large functions like the popular mud bog fundraisers for the Upper Lancaster Volunteer Fire Department and has offered free blood pressure checks and stand-by service at various events held at Yankee Point Marina in Ottoman. A few have even done 'career day' at an elementary school.

"Our membership is dwindling quickly," said Rock. "So we're spread very thin but try to do what we can.

"Volunteering is rewarding and gives you a sense of accomplishment and fulfillment when you impact the lives of others. It's a wonderful way to give back to your community and build strong, lasting relationships while impacting the lives of the people you are providing care," she added.

The squad also rotates a schedule with **Kilmarnock Volunteer Rescue Squad** (KVRS) for standby service at all of the Lancaster High School home football games. According to Capt. Craig Thompsen KVRS also supports large community gatherings and can be found on standby at the annual Memorial Day Service at Christ Church in Weems, the Northern Neck Family YMCA's annual Polar Bear Plunge and at all of the Music on the Half Shell concerts at Kilmarnock Town Centre Park. The squad is also pres-

In Lancaster, Northumberland and Middlesex counties, volunteer rescue squads are on standby at high school football games.

Mid-County Volunteer Rescue Squad members Nina Bhat (left) and Charles Howard demonstrate equipment at the annual St. Stephen's Episcopal Church Strawberry Festival.

Mid-County Volunteer Rescue Squad president Valerie Barton displays a few of the Cook Squad's events. The Cook Squad prepared and served over 100 meals, most of them free, for Thanksgiving.

Mid-County Volunteer Rescue Squad and Northumberland County Rescue Squad joined forces with other first responders last year to send outdated equipment to the Ukraine. Photo by Lisa Hinton-Valdrighi

ent every night of the Kilmarnock Volunteer Fire Department Firemen's Festival.

The squad hopes to restart its free community CPR classes and holds an open house every April to offer free health screenings. The open house also includes other volunteer service agencies like the Coast Guard, fire departments and police.

"We have 24 members, but a lot are associate members, so that limits our abilities to do other things," said Thompsen. "The number of people willing to volunteer has dropped off. But in the past six or eight months, the number of younger people volunteering has increased so that's hopeful."

In Northumberland County, **Mid-County Volunteer Rescue Squad** president Valerie Barton said the volunteers in her squad are present at almost all the major events in the county—the farmers markets, parades, high school graduation, high school athletic events like swim meets and the annual St. Stephen's Episcopal Church Strawberry Festival. Volunteers also participate in school career days and the National Night Out event. Mid-County, the youngest of the three Northumberland County volunteer rescue squads, rotates stand-by service at Northumberland High School football games with **Northumberland County Rescue Squad** and **Callao Volunteer Rescue Squad.**

"Our primary focus, of course, is to answer rescue calls, but we perform many other community interactions, especially when there are a large number of people gathered at events," said Barton.

Most area volunteer rescue squads offer free CPR classes to the community.

Volunteers gather for pre-festival prep at the Urbanna Oyster Festival. Middlesex Volunteer Rescue Squad organizes volunteer EMTs from Lancaster, Middlesex, Mathews and Gloucester for standby at the annual two-day event.

Her squad has 26 active members, while Callao has only four or five.

"All three of us do what we can in the community," she said. "We, of course because of where our squad is located, do standbys for most of the school and county events in Heathsville. But those squads will do other things in their areas if they are asked."

Mid-County also offers blood pressure checks at many of these functions and is there to answer basic first aid questions.

CPR/AED (automated external defibrillator) classes are offered at the squad building in Heathsville and at various churches and homeowner association meetings throughout the county.

"Anywhere we are asked to be present, we try to be," said Barton.

"Dessert with the Doc" is an in-house seminar held in the late spring and early fall for seasonal-related injures like heatstroke, frostbite, snake bites, tick bites and jellyfish stings. Mid-County also has one general first aid session offering information on "knowing what to do or at least the first steps to take for a stroke or heart attack," said Barton.

For the past two years, Mid-County's Cook Squad has offered over 100 free full Thanksgiving dinners for the elderly, "something we're especially proud of," said Barton. "You can either pay for the meal or if you're over 75 you get it for free.

"We have a lot of folks who have parents or a parent that live here and they'll come in and pick up the meals for themselves and their parents or parent because it's hard and time consuming to cook a whole Thanksgiving meal for just two or three people. And it's a complete meal, nine items, from cranberry sauce to dessert."

The meals are offered on a first-come-first-serve basis. The plan this year is to also offer Easter dinners, said Barton. "It's a community-service but it also becomes a fundraiser for us because even though the meals are free to the elderly, lots of people make a donation."

Mid-County donated an AED, cabinet and signage to Northumberland Middle School in 2021.

And sometimes the squad's outreach is far-reaching, like in July 2022 when the squad joined with volunteers from Northumberland County Rescue Squad and the Northumberland County Sheriff's Office to donate an estimated $60,000 worth of medical supplies for victims of the war in Ukraine.

"I'm very proud of all the things we accomplish," said Barton. "And I want others to know how rewarding volunteering can be."

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