

The Monmouth Journal

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Port Monmouth EMS accepts bariatric stretcher from Elks



Middletown Elks members Mike Dickie, 48 (from left) of Middletown, Mike Parulis, 42, of Port Monmouth, EMS President Ken Howe, 26, of Port Monmouth, and Elk Bob Santoro, 48, of Middletown, are making it easier, and more dignified, to assist bariatric patients locally and throughout the state. Photo by Diane Carlton The Monmouth Journal

By Diane Carlton
The Monmouth Journal

Port Monmouth —When the Port Monmouth First Aid squad recognized the need to upgrade their equipment, EMS President Ken Howe reached out to the organization that has always lent a helping hand to the all-volunteer organization.

“The Elks have always said, ‘If there’s anything else you need, just let us know,’” said Howe. Writing a letter to the Middletown Elks Lodge No. 2179, Howe, 26, made a decision to keep the Port Monmouth unit “unique” among the five first aid squads, here, including Fairview, Leonardo, Lincroft and Middletown. “We pride ourselves on the medical side,” he said. “And we love to get into other things that the other units don’t have.”

Being one of only two known bariatric units in the state, the Port Monmouth EMS sought to upgrade their equipment to include a new Ferno brand stretcher that will be able to transport patients up to 900 pounds safely, and with dignity. The new, sturdy stretcher hooks on to a winch which lifts the patient into the ambulance supported by a ramp system.

Howe said, “With the population getting bigger, and a large percentage in excess of 400 pounds, EMS units do not have proper equipment.”

Rooted in the principles of charity, justice, brotherly love, and fidelity, the Elks have a longstanding tradition of

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... serving people and communities through benevolent programs. Exalted Ruler Michael Parulis Jr., 42, of Port Monmouth, said, "That's why we're here."

Having the funds readily available in their charitable account, the Elks quickly purchased the nearly \$5,000 piece of equipment.

The bariatric unit was created in 2005 and consists of a specialty response vehicle specifically designed to transfer and transport bariatric (obese) patients. Traditionally, significant manpower and improper equipment is used to transport such patients, which is not only unsafe, but can be embarrassing and undignified for the patient.

A typical bariatric patient, described Howe, has not left the house in over a year and the calls are generally for transportation to a medical facility and are not "life threatening" emergencies where CPR is in progress.

Responding to over 30 calls since its formation, the bariatric unit has responded as far away as Elizabeth, Howell, and Cranbury, as well as servicing the local towns.

Howe said that, though there are four for-profit units in the state that charge approximately \$2,500 for use of their bariatric units, the Port Monmouth EMS is 100 percent volunteer. "We don't charge. We work strictly off donations," he said.

The Port Monmouth First Aid has sent an announcement, along with guidelines, to local EMS units and is proud to offer the service, locally, as opposed to areas of the state that can wait upwards of two hours when a bariatric unit has to travel a greater distance. "The residents of Middletown have this at their door. We can be there in 10 minutes," said Howe.

During such tight economic times, Howe said the Elks donation is the perfect example of how volunteerism can play a great strategic role in keeping taxes and insurance costs down.

"Both organizations have been around to serve the community — now we've joined our forces," said Howe.

Interested volunteers who would like more information about joining the Port Monmouth First Aid Squad can call 732-787-9566 or visit their Web site at www.middletownems.org.

For more information about supporting Elks Lodge No. 2179 call 732-495-2733 or visit www.middletownelks2179.org.

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