

COMMUNITY NEEDS
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Staff photo by Keith J. Woods

Ken Howe, president of the Port Monmouth First Aid Squad, poses with the squad's 750-pound capacity stretcher, donated by Elks Lodge 2179.

Stretcher can handle big tasks

By **SAMETTA M. THOMPSON**
Correspondent

MIDDLETOWN — The next time the Port Monmouth First Aid squad is called to transport an obese patient, they will have upgraded equipment to do the job.

That's because the Middletown Elks Lodge 2179 donated a 750-pound-capacity stretcher to the group. The volunteer squad had reached out to the community for help.

The stretcher, which cost about \$4,700, will be used for the squad's bariatric ambulance.

The squad needed a new stretcher because they were using an outdated model that carried a person weighing only up to 600 pounds, said Ken Howe, squad president for three years and a member for seven.

The squad converted one of its four ambulances into a bariatric unit in 2005. That vehicle is a specialty response unit designed to carry overweight individuals.

Howe said the squad's bariatric ambulance is one of two volunteer first aid units in New Jersey. There are six units of such rigs altogether in the state, he said. It will take four people to operate the new stretcher, which is 3 feet wide.

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Stretcher

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The squad has responded to more than 30 bariatric emergencies to date in towns as far away as Elizabeth and Cranbury, as well as servicing more local towns such as Howell.

The life of the stretcher is between seven to 10 years. Howe said stretchers are replaced because of improved technology. The new stretcher provides a safe environment for emergency responders and those being treated, he said.

"Now we can better efficiently accomplish our task," Howe said. "Now we are getting the right equipment for our units to go anywhere in the state. The generous donation from the Elks will keep us rolling."

If the stretcher is kept on the ground, Howe said, it can support a person up to 1,000 pounds.

The ramp and winch system can safely unload and load a patient into the ambulance if the weight is too heavy, he said.

Anyone interested in joining the squad can call (732) 787-9566, or visit www.MiddletownEMS.org on the Web.