

WILTON VOLUNTEER AMBULANCE CORPS (WVAC)

History

Throughout the 1970s, Wilton and many other suburban areas throughout the United States used the police as the primary responder to medical emergencies. Two designated police officers would respond to a medical call in a modified Cadillac hearse. With the emphasis on speed rather than patient care, any serious patient would simply be rushed to the hospital with, at best, an oxygen mask on his/her face. The police officers were rarely medically trained past knowing how to apply oxygen and how to package the patient for a rapid transport.



Chief Robert Northcott and Sergeant Richard Barringer-early 1970s

In late August 1976, Wilton's First Selectwoman Rosemarie Verrilli created the Wilton Ambulance Council and charged it with the task of finding a suitable system of emergency medical care for the town. The council was comprised of the Fire Chief, the Volunteer Fire Chief, the Police Chief, any interested prospective EMT's, and its chairman, Jack Cahill.

The Wilton Ambulance Council convened the next month, September 1976, and determined there was a need for an ambulance corps. The council put a note in the Wilton Bulletin asking any persons interested in being a part of such corps to attend a meeting that October. The October meeting was well attended and soon officers were elected, members were trained, and an ambulance was purchased. By July 1st, 1977, the Wilton Volunteer Ambulance Corps began service to town residents and received its first call on July 4th to the town fireworks for someone with a possible broken leg. That one call has since turned into 1400 calls a year and the relatively meager base of volunteers has turned into upwards of 60 members.

The corps spent the late 70s acquainting itself to the task of emergency medical response. Eventually WVAC members found themselves with pagers and uniforms supplied by the town. Supplementing town funds were local businesses and supporters – some of which remain contributors to the organization today. These local funds went to the medical equipment such as oxygen and first aid kits.

By the early 1980s, WVAC had asserted itself in the Wilton Community; when someone called 911 and had a medical emergency, within minutes they would see someone in a WVAC uniform with jump kit in hand ready to save a life. True to its roots, WVAC continues today to encourage a community-based response. Called "Neighborhood Response," members are encouraged to respond in their personal vehicles to serious calls that come in nearby. This additional tier in the response triad of Police, Fire, and EMS makes lifesaving interventions that much more available. WVAC continues to maintain a vibrant, dedicated base of volunteers that are ready to help out on moment's notice.

WVAC remains, like its historical roots, intertwined in the Wilton community and still to this day is on call 24/7, 365 days a year.

WVAC Today

Current membership

WVAC currently has a membership of 55 volunteers with a median membership of 5-10 years, several much longer. The majority of our volunteers have full time employment or are in school full time. Because we have 40% student volunteers, we do see a yearly attrition rate of approximately 30% as many of these volunteers need to resign due to college or jobs out of the area. (Note: many of our college volunteers will take on shifts when they are back in Wilton for holiday breaks or summer vacations)

WVAC Operation

WVAC operates 24/7 – 365 days per year. The Monday – Friday shifts from 6AM to 6PM are covered by paid EMTs from Norwalk Hospital. WVAC Volunteers support every weekday night from 6:00PM – 6AM, and the full 24 hours on Saturdays, Sundays and holidays. This equates to 11,256 hours per year based on a 2-person crew. (8,760 volunteer hours and 2, 496 paid Norwalk EMT hours) Most times we have 3 person crews which include an apprentice. (EMT in training)

WVAC volunteers are required to work a minimum of 36 hours of shift time per month. Many members work more than that in order to make sure we have complete coverage. In addition, if a 2nd call comes in while the duty crew is out on a call, volunteers respond from home with the backup ambulance.

Call Volume in 2022 was at an all-time high of 1689 which has more than tripled since 1989 when WVAC responded to 525 calls. The increase in assisted living/nursing facilities had contributed to this increase over the years.

YEAR	# CALLS
1989	525
1998	742 – 41% Increase
2008	1242 – 67% Increase
2018	1403 – 13% Increase
2022	1689 – 20% Increase

There has been a 222% increase in calls volume from 1989 to 2022

***We are expecting greater numbers with ASML, new apartments and medical facilities in town**

Community Service/Events

WVAC Volunteers also support the town of Wilton through various community events. In FY 22, WVAC logged over 250 Community Volunteer hours. Now that Covid is for the most part behind us, we expect those numbers to increase as we get back to supporting events which were put on hold.

Examples of Events Supported by WVAC include High School Football Games and other sports events, Chamber of Commerce town events (Holiday Stroll, Summer Sidewalk Sales, 4th of July Fireworks,

Halloween Parade), Miller Driscoll Carnival, Ambler Farm and the Grange events, and Memorial Day Parade.

WVAC is also focused on community education outreach with offerings of AED/Hand-Only CPR and Stop the Bleed Training to student groups, CERT, Church groups and Wilton Public School teachers. We are happy to provide training to any group that is interested.

Training

All patient care providers at WVAC are trained Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs). The EMT course consists of at least 180 hours of clinical training with additional practical training and Emergency Department rotations. WVAC has training meetings every month to ensure the patient care of its crew members remains top-notch and to recertify which occurs ever 2 years. In addition to these meetings, WVAC runs its own internal EMT class for those wishing to advance their certification.

Current Garage/Headquarters Situation

There are several main issues with the existing building and site:

1) The site has a small Quonset hut (garage) constructed in the 1980s at the bottom of the property. It was intended to be a temporary structure but 40 years later it is still in use and has been modified many times over the years to a point where it no longer fits the modern needs of the WVAC. This was a temporary structure that became permanent over the years. It ends up being too small and does not allow for adequate room for equipment storage and vehicles to be serviced and stored. Note: currently 3 of the 4 vehicles are stored in this structure. The back-up ambulance is kept in the fire house.

2) The Headquarters (owned by the town) was an old residence that was converted but mostly retains its original floorplan of a single-family home. With the quantity of staff that can vary each day, using the facility can be a problem with the function of the service. There is inadequate meeting and sleeping areas for all of the volunteers and in the event that there is a large weather incident there is no room for out-of-town services to join in and stay at the complex.

- House is Old: lights flicker, kitchen and bathrooms are antiquated, severe plumbing issues
- Medics will need to have their own space.

3) There are many times during the calendar year where there are training programs held at the facility and there is no room for more than a few people to meet in a small common room in the existing building. Providing hands-on training, which is crucial to the WVAC volunteers, is especially challenging (almost next to impossible) with the limited space.

4) There are limited sleeping quarters for the staff and the rooms that are used are shared with supplies storage and equipment storage. More sleeping space is required for those times when we need to have 2 crews on duty. (There would be space for DPW and others who might need overnight space to set up cots in the event of emergencies)

5) The business offices in the back of the structure are small and limited to only 2 workstations where they need closer to double that.

6) Not being able to store vehicles close to the building may be one of the more difficult problems, as is the general maneuvering of the vehicle in and out of the garage before and after calls are made during the day.

7) There is no covered walkway to the garage where the vehicles reside. The stairs leading to the hut are out in the elements and the stairs down are not regular sized stairs which can often be slippery and/or icy.

8) There is no water access in the garage eliminating our ability to clean our vehicles or wash equipment. We are forced to go to the firehouse to clean our trucks and equipment.

9) Need more storage for our supplies (right now we keep a lot over at Comstock in Cert's storage as well as other spaces that are available.) Having all our supplies in one storage area in the headquarters building will be much more efficient.

We hope that these many points will illustrate the need the WVAC has for a new structure and that the improvements will not only create an efficient working organization but will also add a modern and valuable resource to Wilton for many years to come.