

BLACKDUCK AMBULANCE

Contributed by Bryan Shastid

Imagine what it was like in the 1960's and earlier - what it must have been like to witness or be involved in a car crash! You would have to look up the telephone number of the Sheriff's office, and probably have to call "long distance" to reach them - then while waiting for deputies to arrive, the injured could only be aided through the good intentions of bystanders. The waiting often resulted in the injuries becoming more serious. Eventually, in some locations, an "ambulance" furnished by a funeral home, would arrive. It sometimes had a light and siren, and was usually staffed by two attendants. They would put their patient on a stretcher, place it in the ambulance; then both attendants would get into the front seat, and aided by their souped-up engines race as fast as they could to the nearest hospital. The U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), realized that people were dying needlessly on the way to the hospital, and began what has become our modern-day EMS (Emergency Medical Services).

The Blackduck Ambulance Service has been in existence since 1972. It is unclear what was used for an ambulance before that time although some of the original ambulance attendants stated they took a three hour long first aid course to be certified as an attendant. In 1972, new laws were passed requiring ambulance attendants to complete and pass a 27-hour long Advanced First Aid Course. The City of Blackduck Ambulance Service had a crew of 12 volunteers, (all but one of which were firefighters) and one ambulance parked in the fire hall.

An addition was added to the city garage in 1977 that made a new home for the ambulance service until they moved to the current city hall. A fund-raiser basketball game against the ambulance crew was held as well as an open house with free-will donations that year. Requirements for training increased to an 84-hour EMT course (Emergency Medical Technician).



Blackduck Ambulance Service

The 1980's brought several changes to the ambulance service. In 1981, issues that continue to plague the service were addressed, one of which is the shortage of weekday volunteers. A full time administrator was hired by the city of Blackduck to help resolve that problem. New equipment was purchased, including Medical Anti Shock Trousers (MAST) as well as a new ambulance! In 1982, a benefit dinner / musical entitled, "I Do, I Do!" was held, which raised a thousand dollars for the ambulance service. A defibrillator was then purchased in 1983 and the ambulance service acquired a certified EMT instructor on staff in 1985 who was then able to teach the new 100-hour EMT class. The service quickly outgrew its space in the city garage and a new facility with a garage, office, and training room was built and opened in 1989.

Several major challenges faced the service in the 1990's. Beltrami County went county wide with its 9-1-1 system, removing the old emergency number based at the nursing home. The ambulance service's administrator left and the volunteer crew was down to just 5 EMT's, (the minimum number the state allowed to keep a service open). Due to a

host of factors, the City of Blackduck decided to dissolve its ambulance service. However, the volunteers, with help from the city, formed its own ambulance service which became the Blackduck Ambulance Association, Inc. in April of 1995. New classes were held which boosted the roster to nearly 20 volunteers. New ambulances were purchased to replace the older rigs and the association expanded its scope of practice to include IV's and certain drug administration, as well as advanced airway placement. Communications were also improved with two-way radios and alpha-numeric pagers. Inter-agency training also increased during this time. Donations were received from local groups such as the fire departments, VFW and Legion Clubs, as well as from private citizens, to allow for new equipment to be purchased.

The ambulance service's most recent challenge was in 1999 when, once again, they lost many members who covered shifts during the day nearly forcing it to close. The association went before the Beltrami County Board and obtained temporary funding to pay for full time positions to cover day shifts. A task force was formed to develop a permanent solution to this problem that had plagued the service nearly from its beginning.

Today, the Blackduck Ambulance Association has many goals, some of which include increasing the scope of practice to part time Advanced Life Support capabilities and eventually placing satellite stations throughout the area it serves. Other goals are promoting safety and good health to the community through appearances at health fairs, and presentations to young people during National EMS Week every May.

The Blackduck Ambulance is truly a community based, volunteer service. Without the support of the community, it would have vanished a long time ago and it could not function today without its volunteers. The Association states that as long as support and funding are there, it will respond when needed to provide the top notch, skilled, and professional pre-hospital care the community needs and expects.
