

EVAC by DAYTONA REVISITED

The City of Daytona Beach has voted unanimously to ask the County Council to turn over ambulance service to the Daytona Beach fire department. Let us put in perspective the program of the fire fighters union to find more work for fire departments that have less and less to do. There are almost no structural fires (house) fires as the stock of houses is more and more built under modern codes. There are less and less med/evac calls and when you read the narratives submitted with the statistics it is obvious that few of the heart attack cases cited to justify fast response for ventricle fibrillation result in the patient getting to the hospital alive. The fact is that there is less and less work for a more and more expensive set of less and less needed overbuilt facilities that are over staffed.

The method used by the Union in other Florida Counties for breaking into the ambulance business can be seen by how they have cherry picked the cities where they have made an effort. Normally they have picked more affluent small cities that have a high retiree base with those having pensions, and where the charges to insurance companies are more likely to be paid. The push at Daytona Beach is more than a little anomaly because of its larger and average low income base that is less likely to be insured. There is almost no chance that the economic analysis the fire department advanced as cost effective could withstand any close scrutiny. In fact if the County Council were cynical, it could shuck this service to the City and save a bundle of money because the City would be saddled with carrying a disproportionate number of non-paying patients. But being sensible and caring about all County residents no matter how stupid their local government, they will do no such thing. We reprint below the article from May 19, 2008, and will review the current proposal that was just voted on after we have obtained requested material.

Article from May 19, 2008. THE FIRE DEPARTMENT IS OUT OF WORK

In a separate article last week we highlight the efforts of the fire and police department unions to change the collective bargaining rules

on the National scene. This is one of two articles about how one of the local fire unions, here in Daytona Beach, is seeking to prevent layoffs. The Daytona Beach union President Mike Tyrrell, IAFF Local 1162, with the help of interim fire chief Gary Hughes, actually wants to hire more employees during tax reform by augmenting its workload in the face of decreasing fires by trying to take over ambulance service from EVAC, a non-profit agency, that has provided countywide ambulance service for 25 plus years. The effort is to capture public and private ambulance services for the fire departments. It has been a goal of fire departments in Florida for some time.

The plan is to undermine the unified countywide ambulance service just as it has been done in other Florida jurisdictions. The primary arguments are that fire departments can provide better service at a lower cost, and that the City will make a profit, whereas EVAC is subsidized. The Shadow believes both arguments are bogus.

Countywide ambulance service was unified and consolidated in 1981 by the legislature. Why would the fire department want to undo this? We believe it is self-preservation, or maybe they do not want to be unified or consolidated.

The first big salvo of the Firefighter's Unions this spring to aggrandize further their function is the presentation by the Daytona Beach Fire Chief to his City Council proposing that the Daytona Beach Fire Department take over ambulance service within the city. We quote:

"I am not saying there's anything bad about the service EVAC is providing, but this will assure continuity in care, reduce the loss of critical information, and reduce the chance of patient cross-contamination."

Three "reasons" are thus advanced and we think they are nonsensical. You are invited to wander through the fuzzy argument he advanced about "Cross Contamination" and "reduce the loss of critical information". My truck is cleaner than your ambulance. WOW. My computer Information Technology people can type better than yours can? WOW. Moreover, what in the devil's name is

“continuity of care” that can be provided by his fire truck that cannot be provided by an EVAC vehicle. Does “continuity of care” imply that the EVAC unit does not go to an emergency room just as the fire department would? It does suggest that EVAC leaves patients in the hospital parking lot while the fire department would take them to the emergency room door. WOW. If this is true, why is EVAC not under investigation for malfeasance, misfeasance, or non-feasance?

The real issue is that fire departments see both of their main raison d’être for existence diminishing before their very eyes. The wide distribution of smoke detectors, commercial fire sprinklers, good public education, and strict building codes has greatly diminished the real number of fires. There are fewer and fewer house fires and large brush fires are being fought by larger cadres of firefighters from multiple jurisdictions. Heavy equipment for fighting brush fires is provided by the forest service; however, city and county fire departments respond to what they call “urban wildland” fires, currently extinguished by the Department of Forestry. They do provide needed water spraying while the Forest Service carves the break lines.

Medical calls that they have tried to arrogate solely to themselves, as with house fires, diminished starting in the 1960s. They are no longer growing, and the “first response” agreements with the County mean that close by County stations siphon off work. Over the years they have been thwarted in their efforts to gain control of ambulance. This is not the first time the Daytona Beach Fire Department has tried to fragment emergency medical services under a veil of providing same service with union labor.

Generating more demand for one’s services is a way to protect your turf. This started with training firefighters to be EMT’s and Paramedics in anticipation of being assigned the EVAC responsibility by their employers, the municipalities. However, that effort was stymied by the State Legislature when they assigned the responsibility to the Counties. EVAC in Volusia County is operated by a non-profit agency established by the County, and governed a volunteer board of directors representing a cross-section of business and community leaders, including elected officials.

Taking over EVAC is certainly not the answer to the Daytona Beach Fire Chief's problem. First, it is subsidized by the County because 40% of those transported are indigent and do not pay. With its larger percentage of low income, no health insurance residents than the County, the percentage of non-paying patients in Daytona Beach would probably higher than in the County. Therefore, it would simply cost Daytona Beach more rather than less and require a subsidy to breakeven.

Even more nonsensical is the Union proclaiming that a medical call requires four people to a truck. HUH? Remember where the number four came from, it was their claim that one is needed for crowd control (what are the police for?), one for public information, one a trained specialist to deal with airway control, heart compression, and IVs, and two to handle the necessary emergency medical problem, whatever that might be. We were wondering how many calls there were in a decade where the third person would have been helpful and not just in the way. EVAC ambulances seem to do a particularly good job with two personnel, but all fire department vehicles according to the union will "need" four. The New Smyrna Beach IAFF local President made a presentation several weeks ago stating that you needed four firefighters on a fire truck for a medical call. See Shadow Archives May 12, 2008.

Let's go back to the Chief's opening remark where he said, " I am not saying there is anything bad with the service EVAC is providing." What does he mean? That EVAC is doing a good job with two personnel per vehicle, or that his department could do a better job with four, and if so, how can he quantify the benefit versus the cost? What is going on here? Has he been planning to make this pitch for some time? We are told that Daytona Beach has been purchasing fire vehicles with no water or fire fighting capacity---ambulances. Is this not a waste of money? Is this a duplication of service? If they were required to fight a fire they would have to return to the firehouse or have a fire engine driven to them. They do have authority to transport to hospitals if there is a catastrophe. That agreement has been in place 3 or 4 years and the Shadow discovered there has not been a declared instance of need since the

plans inception. However, we are told that the Daytona Beach Fire Department has been giving FREE ambulance transport to city employees. Why have they been purchasing these vehicles? Who authorized the fire department to buy vehicles with ambulance capacity? Who allowed the fire department to give free transport to City workers while taxpayers and tourists must pay for the same service?

You must give the Unions credit, they do not give up. They have been trying for years to dismantle EVAC the same way they have Balkanized fire and police services in both small and large towns within the County. The result of this fire department Balkanization has been increased costs to the municipalities and their taxpayers because of unnecessary, expensive management and personnel costs that they have not controlled. Daytona Beach should view this proposal as nothing more than a power grab, and if successful, there will be no increase in public safety, but a significant increase in cost for Daytona Beach.
