

Renewed Focus for Local EMS

Klickitat County Emergency Medical Services District 1 expands its role

By Jeanie Senior

The first day of 2018 marked a transition for Klickitat County Emergency Medical Services District 1.

On January 1, the district assumed full control of its operation, providing ambulance and emergency medical services to a 1,900-square-mile area that includes most of Klickitat County. With the exception of a little paperwork, Dave Lapof, district operations manager, says it was a seamless transfer.

Dave writes a column called Triage, which he regularly sends to county newspapers and community newsletters. In it, he said, “The crews responded to calls for service, and we began the new year just like any other day.”

The EMS district was created after the county’s two hospitals, Klickitat Valley in Goldendale and Skyline in White Salmon, divested and consolidated their ambulance services.

For several years, the district contracted with Goldendale-based Hadassah Management Systems LLC to manage the operation. The EMS district assumed control after Hadassah’s contract expired at the end of 2017.

When the Klickitat EMS board offered him the operations manager job, Dave was a division chief for Mid-Columbia Fire and Rescue.

He has been a CPR instructor, a volunteer firefighter, a 911 dispatcher, and fire chief in the Seal Rock and Siletz fire departments on the Oregon Coast.

He and three partners started an ambulance company in Bellingham and ran it for five years.

Under Washington state law, District 1



Dave Lapof has been Klickitat County EMS District 1 operations manager since July 2017.

is considered a special purpose district, which gives it the ability to seek funding through a voter-approved tax levy. The current levy expires in December 2019, and the EMS board is discussing the district’s future budget.

Fiscal challenges, Dave says, mean the Klickitat EMS district must practice what he calls “basic frugality.”

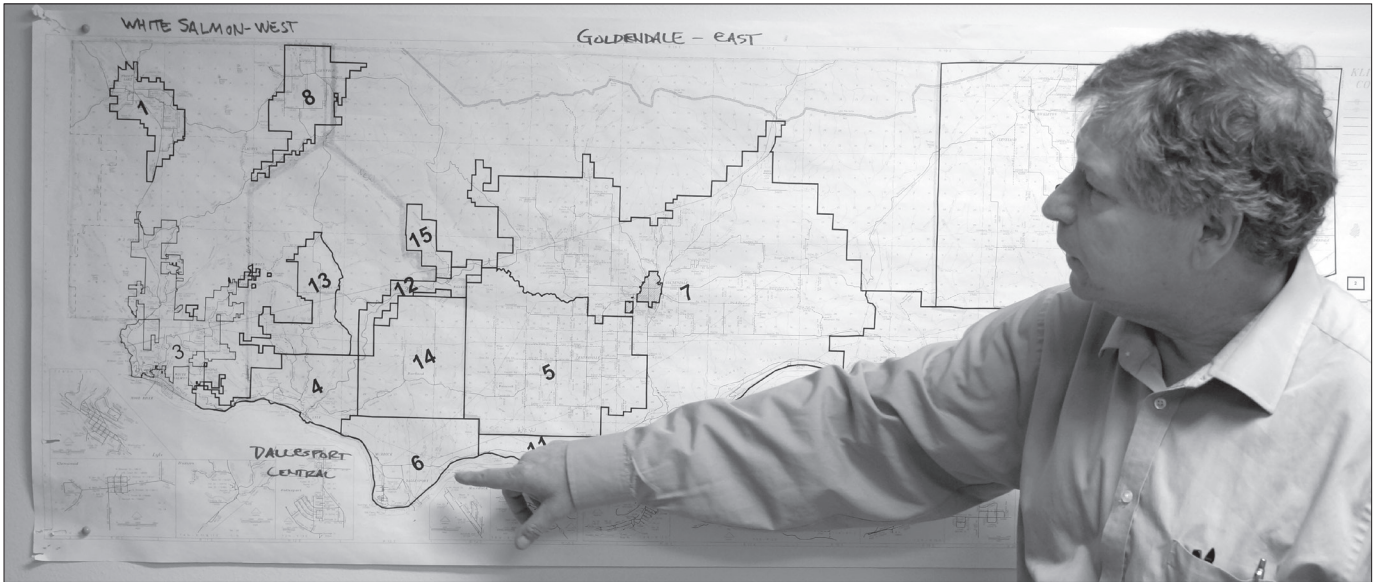
One priority going forward is bringing the pay for EMS district paramedics and EMTs closer to that of similarly sized departments in Washington and Oregon.

The district has 20 full-time

employees—half of which are paramedics, the other half EMTs—and 12 part-time employees. More than 80 percent of the agency budget goes to payroll.

Ambulance crews work 48 consecutive hours, and rotate among stations in Dallesport, White Salmon and Goldendale. The Dallesport facility is near the Mid-Columbia Regional Airport, the latter two on property adjacent to Skyline and Klickitat Valley hospitals.

Dave says another priority is updating the district’s fleet of aging ambulances. To keep costs minimal, the district is opting



Klickitat County Emergency Medical District 1 includes most of Klickitat County and covers 1,900 square miles.

for “remounts,” which means transferring the existing ambulance module to a new truck chassis. A new ambulance costs about \$185,000, whereas a remount is about \$110,000.

The first remounted ambulance arrived in the district last December. Work started on another in January, and a third ambulance will be refurbished after that.

“It goes without saying this puts a strain on our response capabilities and our finances,” Dave says. “But we cannot operate without dependable ambulances.”

The district has to shuffle its ambulances to deal with the shortage. Dave gestures to an ambulance housed at the Dallesport station. It is shiny and well-maintained, but it is 12 years old—brought back to active duty as a backup.

Reliability is key for an emergency vehicle, and Dave says the cost of maintaining an older, high-mileage unit isn’t cheap. In 2017, repairs were more than \$30,000.

The number of ambulance calls handled by the district continues to climb. It rose from 1,710 in 2015 to 1,900 last year. The growth is predictable, Dave says.

“It’s due to a number of factors,” he explains. “Population of those over 65 is growing, more folks are moving to the area—especially the western part of the

county—and we are growing as a tourist destination.”

Local hospitals increasingly transfer patients to larger hospitals in the Vancouver-Portland urban area. That affects ambulance dispatching because a trip to Portland or Vancouver can take five to six hours.

The district also has lent support and personnel to an EMT class in which

30 students are enrolled. Some attend class in Husum and the remainder in Goldendale, where the class is linked via the internet. The lead instructor is district paramedic Maria Roeder-Simms, who is working toward state certification as a senior EMT instructor.

Adding that many EMTs will be a boon to the county’s volunteer fire departments, Dave says. ■

Move Over for Safety

By Abby Berry

When the power goes out, so do Klickitat PUD’s line crews. Lineworkers are the first to respond when an outage occurs, and they work tirelessly to restore power to the communities we serve.

If you are traveling and see one of our crews on the side of the road, please move over if possible and give them a little extra space to work. We care about the safety of all, and this extra precaution ensures just that.

If you approach a crew while traveling on a two-lane road, moving over to the next lane might not be an option. In this case, we ask you to slow down when approaching roadside crews. If you approach a crew while traveling on a four-lane road, and safety and traffic conditions allow, please move into the far lane.

Emergency responders, such as police officers, firefighters and emergency medical technicians, often find themselves responding to emergency situations near busy roadways. Please follow the same procedures mentioned above to help keep these crews safe.

There is plenty of room for all. Let’s work together to keep everyone safe on our local roadways. ■