

# History of Durham City and Durham County Ambulance, Rescue, and EMS Services

## Research Notes

Last updated: May 20, 2025

### Introduction

These are research notes about the history of ambulance, rescue, and EMS services in Durham city and Durham County.

### 1910 to 1929

1916, Dec – By this time, **Watts Hospital Ambulance Service** was operating. [DMH, 12/26/16] May be the oldest documented hospital-based ambulance service in the state.

1918, circa - The **Durham Life Savings Corps** was established around this time as a Red Cross organization with a mission to promote and provide water safety. This was a national initiative. [DHM, 3/12/53]

### 1930 to 1949

1930, May - **White's Funeral Home** started an ambulance service. It may have been one of the first funeral home ambulance services in the city. [DMH, 5/25/30] Later funeral home ambulance services included **Amey's Funeral Home and Florist**, **Burthey Funeral Service**, **Clements Funeral Service**, **Howerton-Bryan Company**, and **Hudson Funeral Home**.

1939, Sep - Durham funeral homes changed their policy for free ambulance rides effective September 1, 1939, and begin charging for rides. [DS, 8/19/39]

1942 - By this time, the Durham Life Savings Corps were performing water searches, such as using their swimmers and divers to search for a missing girl on the Eno River in July 1942. [DMH, 7/4/42]

1949, May - Durham Life Saving Corps started 24-hour availability for "emergency calls throughout the Durham area." The group had four squads, with five or six people each, plus squad leaders, a First Lieutenant, Second Lieutenant, and Captain. They were affiliated with the City of Durham recreation department. [DMH, 5/22/49]

### 1950 to 1959

1952, Mar - By this time, the **Durham City/County Civil Defense Agency** had been created. [DS, 3/25/52]

1952, May - Durham Life Saving Corps received a new boat. It replaced one "rotting with age" and that couldn't be replaced, due to the Red Cross lacking funds. The city provided funds for the boat, by hiring the Corps to operate the new Long Meadow Pool for \$100. [DMH, 5/22/52]

1953, Mar - Durham Life Saving Corps was being "incorporated" and had been placed on a "year-around call basis" for all types of accident and rescue services. In May, their members joined a ground search for a missing woman nine miles south of town. [DMH, 3/12/53; DS, 5/20/53]

1955, Jul - Durham Life Saving Corps now had two "mobile first aid units" to answer "highway accident calls." These were personal vehicles of members, with emergency equipment such as "blankets, splints, oxygen tanks, flares and first aid equipment of all types." They also had a boat and trailer, which is housed at the Forest Hills Clubhouse. During "special times of the year," such as July 4, the equipment was moved to other locations, such as swimming pools, where "an emergency crew stands by for action on a minute's notice."

The Corps was "primarily a water safety organization" until a few years ago. Their objectives included acquiring a truck to pull the boat and trailer, complete with rescue equipment; an ambulance; radio equipment for the vehicles; and a building or garage to serve as headquarters. They met twice monthly during the summer, and monthly during the rest of the year.

The Corps commander was Fred Hecht. Later that month, the city tentatively approved providing an "obsolete truck" to the Corps, for use in answering emergency calls. [DS, 7/16/55; DMH, 7/29/55]

1956, Mar – Snapshot. Durham Life Saving Corps organizational structure, from news story:

- Commander
- First Lieutenant
- Second Lieutenant
- First Sergeant
- Second Sergeant
- Secretary
- Treasurer
- Medical Officer

- Training Officer

And a Board of Trustees, comprised of a doctor, the city fire chief, and four Corps members. [DS, 3/8/56]

1956, Apr - Durham's white funeral homes announced they would discontinue services, and all such operations would be handled by the new Durham Medical Ambulance Company. [DMH, 4/14/56]

1956, May - **Durham Medical Ambulance Company** started operation on May 1, 1956. Their office was located at 208 Milton Street, and they had four ambulances, with two "trained medical technicians" aboard each. They responded anywhere in the county, at any hour. In addition to "answering accident calls" they provide medical transport and later transported people to "points as distant as Ohio, Alabama, Florida, and Massachusetts." The company was granted a charter in April 1956. The owner, William S. Aiken of Rochester, NY, operated similar services in Rochester, Syracuse (NY), and Dade County, Florida. [DS, 4/13/56, DS 9/1/56]

1956, Dec - Durham Civil Defense applied for a rescue truck through the state agency handling surplus federal property. The truck was apparently never procured. [DS, 12/6/56]

1957, Feb - **Durham Ambulance Service Company** started operating on February 15, 1957. The owners and operators were Aubrey Veasey and Z. M. Ferrell. By October 1947, the address was listed as 208 Milton Street, the same as the former Durham Medical Ambulance Company. [DS, 2/9/57; DS, 10/7/57]

1957, Apr - Durham Medical Ambulance Company discontinued operations in Durham, after deputies seized two of their ambulances on April 5, 1957, due to a court judgment against them. [DS, 4/6/57] Superior Coach Sales Co. later obtained a \$695.15 judgment against the company for breach of contract and the court decreed that the suing company receive monies from the court-ordered sale of a 1948 Packard ambulance and a 1948 Cadillac-Miller combination funeral coach and ambulance. [DHM, 7/13/57]

1957, Sep - **Clyde Kelly Funeral Service** resumed ambulance service, citing a growing need for the service. [DS, 9/19/57]

1957, fall - Durham Ambulance Service Company discontinued service. No advertisements appear in the local papers after October 7, 1957. [DHM, 10/7/57]

1959, Jan - By this time, the Durham County Civil Defense agency had a fire service unit. It was comprised of the city fire department and the county forest service. The unit was led by the city fire chief. Their mission was to "protect life and property and minimize fire damage; assist the engineer, health and rescue services in decontamination of personnel

and equipment resulting from radioactive fallout as required; make available organic rescue personnel and equipment to Civil Defense Rescue Service as direct." They planned to recruit and train a "volunteer and auxiliary fire unit to work as a light rescue service."

As profiled in a January 10 news story, the county CD rescue service was already operational. The Chief was Tommy Powell, assisted by four "zone rescue officers." Their only source of manpower were the 40 members of the Durham Life Savings Corps, and whose leader was one of the county CD rescue officers. [DH, 1/3/59]

1959, Apr - Durham County received a new Civil Defense rescue truck, a four-wheel-drive GMC "carry all" that's fully equipped with "all kinds of rescue equipment." The truck was sent to the city several years ago, "by an enterprising car manufacturer who thought it could be sold." Nobody took interest and it sat on a dealer's lot for a year. A "series of volunteer rescue squads who would spring up, flourish and then wither" practiced on the truck, until it was purchased by the local CD agency with county and federal funds. The cost was likely \$5,000 after the car dealer dropped the price, since he "who wanted it off his lot." [DS, 4/16/59; DMH 10/20/63]

## **1960 to 1969**

■ 1960 - **Durham Fire Department** received a 1957 GMC rescue truck provided by Durham County Civil Defense. It was housed at Station 2, and manned by firefighters who have been trained by the Red Cross in first aid. [DMH 11/9/09]

■ 1962, Aug - Durham FD took over operation of county rescue truck on August 1, 1962, though the service was called the Durham County Rescue Squad. It was previously operated/augmented with volunteers. Four men on each of the two shifts were assigned to the truck. They served with their regular duties as firemen "without extra pay." Each received special training. That included a month's training at the "rescue school operated in Greenville." They also received scuba diving instruction from three men, who volunteered to assist in rescue operations involving drowning victims.

The unit had also received additional equipment, including "diving suits for rescue men along with aqua-lung equipment", hydraulic jacks, air masks, a resuscitator, and additional stretchers. Part of the equipment was furnished by Durham FD, and part was paid through appropriations by local governments. [DMH, 10/20/63]

■ 1963, Aug - During the first six months of 1963, the squad answered 14 calls, ranging from automobile accidents to body recoveries from drownings. From August 1962 to October 1963, they've answered 19 calls, including "drownings, electrocutions, wrecks, heart attacks, and suffocations." [DS, 8/14/63, 10/20/63]

■ 1964, Jun - The Durham County rescue truck was called Rescue 1. Two men operated the truck when on a call, and others off-duty were called to service if needed. The truck was not equipped for transporting patients, however. [DS, 6/2/64]

■ 1964 - Durham FD opened a new Station 1. The rescue truck was moved to Station 1.

1965, Jun - The four white funeral homes in Durham discontinued ambulance service on midnight, June 30, 1965. The firms were Clements, Howerton-Bryan, Hall-Wynne, and Hudson. The city's black funeral homes continued their ambulance service. [DS, 6/17/65, DMH 7/13/66]

1965, Jun - **Durham Ambulance Service, Inc.** started service to Durham city and county on June 30, 1965, as well as in Chapel Hill-Carrboro. The private company was operated by Worth Hill and J. Bates Willett, two members of the Durham police department. They were based at 2906 Roxboro Road, in a building formerly occupied by a piano store. They planned to start with three ambulances, one purchased from a funeral home. The other two were new. They planned to have about six men on duty at all times. [DS 6/16/65; DS 6/17/65]

1966, July - Durham Ambulance Service canceled their previously announced plan to reduce 24/7 ambulance service to only 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. They continued their 24/7 service but decline to cite the reason for the change. The company had been seeking a \$2,000 monthly appropriation from the county, to "keep the firm on a good financial basis." [DMH, 7/13/66, 7/15/66]

■ 1966, Nov - Durham County rescue truck damaged in a vehicle collision at Holloway Street and Alston Avenue on November 6, 1966. The 11:55 p.m. accident injured both men in the rescue truck, and the two people in the car. All were treated at Watts Hospital and released. The severely damaged truck requires replacement, and another vehicle is pressed into service as a temporary replacement. [DS 11/7/66, DS 11/9/66]

■ 1966, Nov or later - Durham County rescue truck replaced with late 1960s GMC van.

1967, Mar - By this time, legislation had been introduced before the General Assembly, making failure to pay for ambulance services, if financially able, a misdemeanor. The bill was introduced by Rep. Donald Stanford of Orange County. The story noted that Durham Ambulance Service was struggling with unpaid bills and had about \$11,000 in unpaid bills from about 550 patients. The figures represented about 30 percent of the company's business. [DS, 3/11/67]

1967, May - Durham Ambulance Service started operating a substation to serve southern and western areas of the city and county, from a house on Burch Avenue between Main and

Chapel Hill streets. The company's main station was located on Roxboro Road in Braggtown. [DMH, 5/5/67]

1968, Jan – Snapshot. Ambulances in Durham were operated by seven firms:

- Durham Ambulance Service, which was subsidized by the city and the county
- **W. A. Amey and Son** funeral home
- **Burthey** funeral home
- **Fisher** funeral home
- **Holloway and Son** funeral home
- **Ellis D. Jones and Son** funeral home
- **Scarborough and Hargett** funeral home

Source: DMH, 1/12/68.

■ 1969, Aug - Durham's rescue truck had answered 300 so far that year. It was staffed by 11 firemen whose "special duty is with the rescue team." Nearly all had special supplemental training. Equipment included an acetylene torch, hydraulic jack, resuscitator, scuba diving gear, block and tackle rigs, breathing masks, and first aid equipment. The truck answered calls throughout Durham County and, in emergency situations, could transport patients. [DMH, 8/10/69]

1969, Aug - Durham Ambulance Service received three new 1969 Ford Econoline half-ton vans, which were converted to ambulances by DAS. They would be used in both Durham and Orange counties. [DS, 8/16/69]

1969 - North Carolina EMS System started. The first EMT class in Durham was taught to Durham FD rescue personnel at Durham Technical College. The eighty-one-hour EMT course created the Fire Driver/Rescue Specialist position on Rescue 1. All emergencies in Durham and Durham County were answered by Rescue 1. This numbered twenty to thirty calls per day.

1969 - **Parkwood Fire Department** members started first-aid training, after a member's son was struck and killed by a garbage truck.

## **1970 to 1979**

1971, Jun - **Durham Hospital County Corporation** created, from a hospital commission formed after county voters approved a \$20 million bond on November 5, 1968, to create Durham County General Hospital. Watts Hospital became part of the new corporation. On March 1, 1973, Lincoln Hospital became part of the corporation. [DMH, 10/3/76]

1972, Mar - Parkwood FD added their first ambulance/rescue vehicle, a donated 1964 Ford Econoline van. It was donated by GTE, which also painted the former telephone vehicle white for the fire department. Firefighters built cabinets and equipped the van. Four [?] years later, it was retired and donated to Atlantic Beach FD.

■ 1972, Jun - New county budget included \$12,000 for a new "civil defense rescue body", as the current one was "about to fall into the street." [DMH, 6/6/72]

1972, Aug - Durham Ambulance Service received five new 1972 Ford Econoline vans, produced by Wayne Sales Company of Kansas City, MO. They are three-quarter ton vans. Their new equipment included suction units and heating and air-conditioning units. They cost \$10,000 each. [DMH, 8/10/72]

■ 1973, Jun - New DFD rescue truck placed in service. The body was built by Murphy and mounted on a one-ton Chevy chassis. It included a patient compartment, though for emergency transport. The squad did not normally transport patients, which was handled by Durham Ambulance Service. The truck was also equipped with an electric winch, a generator, "more lights," and "more storage space for first aid equipment." The truck cost \$12,000, including the equipment on it. It was purchased with local and Civil Defense funds. The old rescue truck was retained, likely as a reserve unit. [Hose & Nozzle, July-August 1973; DMH, 6/8/73]

1974, Jan - Parkwood FD added a 1967 Cadillac Ambulance to replace the rescue van. It was purchased from Newton Square, PA. The Cadillac served until 1978, when it was replaced by a 1978 Ford van ambulance named Rescue 10/Medic 2.

1974, Feb - Durham County commissioners voted to provide \$15,000 per month to Durham Ambulance Service through June 30, 1974, and with the provision that the county receive the "right of collections" on all recoverable Medicaid services from July 1, 1973, to June 30, 1974. The company had told the county last week that they might stop ambulance service on March 1, if the county didn't provide enough of a subsidy for them to "operate effectively." [DS, 2/18/74]

1974, Jul – **Beacon Ambulance Service of Raleigh** started ambulance service as contracted by Durham County on July 1, 1974. They were contracted for one year. [DS, 5/28/75]

■ 1974, Jul – DFD rescue truck collided with a truck at Roxboro Road and Geer Street on July 9, 1974. The squad was responding to a medical call, and struck a pick-up truck that didn't stop for the lights and siren. The pick-up truck overturned and slid into a dump truck parked nearby. No serious injuries were reported. The cab of the rescue truck was totaled. [DMH, 10/\_/74]

1974, fall - Eight Parkwood firemen were certified as EMTs.

■ 1974, Nov – By this time, the DFD rescue truck had returned to service, with a new/updated truck that was received last week. The original Murphy body has been remounted on a larger chassis with a larger cab. [DS, 11/4/74]

■ 1974, Dec – DFD rescue truck collided with car at Roxboro Street and Lakewood Avenue on December 5, 1974, while en route to a medical call. The squad sustained nearly \$900 damage, while the car is totaled. The driver of the car received minor injuries, and is charged with failing to yield the right of way. [DMH, 12/5/74]

■ 1975 - DFD converted to a Public Safety Department. Fire stations had one person to drive the apparatus. Rescue 11 was one exception with a full crew. The unit had been renamed from Rescue 1 with the introduction of county EMS units.

1975, spring – County-run ambulance service started, early incarnation of Durham County EMS. In April 1975, county commissioners granted management privileges to the newly formed Durham County Hospital Corporation. [DS, 5/28/75]

■ 1975, spring - The first director of the new county ambulance service was Mickey Tezai, who served until 2005. [DHS, 3/24/05]

1975, Jun - Durham County Hospital Corporation started ambulance service at 5:00 p.m. on Saturday, June 1. The county-owned service had six ambulances staffed by two-person crews. Each were EMTs. Five were placed in service at old Watts Hospital and old Lincoln Hospital. The sixth ambulance would serve as a "standby vehicle." Fees were charged for the service. The units were named Rescue 1, Rescue 2, etc. The average call volume was 750-900 per month. [DS, 5/28/75]

1976, Dec – By this time, **Triangle Ambulance and Convalescent Services Inc.** was operating and might help relieve the burden on the county ambulance system for transport of non-emergency patients. They were located at 2902 [?] Hillsborough Road. [DS, 12/30/76]

1976 - DCEMS started an ALS training program to advance their members to the EMT-I level by the end of the year.

1976 - Parkwood FD received a new modular ambulance (Rescue 9), ordered through Governor's Highway Safety Program with matching funds. It was placed in service October 1976. The unit was chosen to accompany President Ford, during his visit to the North Carolina State Fair that month.



■ 1975-76 – DFD rescue personnel were trained to EMT-I level.

1978 - By end of year, DCEMS had implemented the county's first paramedic level response system. One ambulance was a paramedic unit at first, the remaining four were EMT intermediate.

■ 1979, Jul - Durham City Council again rejected request for a second fire department rescue truck. The city had tried for the last two years. Noted the Public Safety Director, the county was so large that one truck cannot cover the entire area consistently. He wanted to add a second truck and split the response time. Currently, when Rescue 11 was not available, the department instead dispatched a city police car, city fire truck, or a fire truck from one of Durham's three volunteer FDs.

The proposal has also received criticism, including from the Durham County Ambulance Service Director, a former DFD rescue squad member. He said that though Rescue 11 was often dispatched, it was usually "turned back" before reaching the scene. In April 1979, notes a news story, Rescue 11 was cancelled only about 22 percent of the time. The ambulance service director also believed that most calls could be handled without the assistance of the rescue truck, which was not needed "ninety percent of the time."

During April 1979, Rescue 11 answered an average of 8.1 calls per 24-hour shift, and took an average of 21.1 minutes to arrive at each call. [DHM, 7/22/79]

## **1980 to 1989**

1980 - DCEMS relocated Station 1 from old Watts Hospital to a new building off Roxboro Road on the Durham County General Hospital campus. The old ambulance center was now part of the North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics. The new ambulance center was a one-story building with four vehicle bays. [DS, 2/20/89]

■ 1981 [?] - DFD received new rescue truck, a 1981 Ford F-700/FrontLine. Painted all-white. [FAJ]

1982, Nov - Durham County commissioners voted to take over regulation of ambulance service throughout the county. Existing and new ambulance services were required apply for the three-year franchise. The ordinance became law on January 1, 1983, and required providers to have insurance, specific equipment, and staff each ambulance with two EMTs when responding to emergency calls.

In January 1983, the county approved six ambulance services for franchise:

- Durham County Hospital Corporation ambulance division

- Durham Public Safety Emergency Rescue Division
- Parkwood VFD
- **Piedmont Ambulance Service**
- **Southeastern Medevac**
- Triangle Ambulance and Convalescent Service

[DMH, 11/16/82, DS, 1/18/83]

1983, Jan - Durham Morning Herald reported that Triangle Ambulance and Convalescent Service, Inc., had been granted a reprieve, after losing its ambulance franchise, due to violation state law requiring certification with the department of human resources. [DMH, 1/22/83]

1983 - **Lebanon Fire Department** started First Responder program.

1984 - **Bethesda Fire Department** started operating as an ambulance provider. Durham County donated a 1978 Ford ambulance. BFD started planning for the program in September 1983. The Durham County General Hospital Ambulance Division started training Bethesda firefighters to be EMTs. They started responding to rescue calls in their fire district in March 1984. They were franchised as an ambulance provider in November 1984.

1985 - Bahama FD started First Responder program.

■ 1985 - D FD discontinued Public Safety Department program. Fire and police departments were separated.

■ 1986 – DFD rescue truck involved in an accident. After extensive repairs, it was repainted in department's new white-over-red color scheme. [FAJ] Recalled the department's historian: When the rescue truck was out of service due to accidents, a van or reserve pumper was used in their place. Or an old Battalion Chief Chevy Blazer. Also, around this time, the rescue truck was moved to Station 3 for a period of time, to house all haz-mat team members together. It was moved back to Station 1 due to the long runs to structure fires.

1987, Jul - **Duke University Medical Center** sought an ambulance franchise by this time, to operate a "mobile intensive care" unit as backup for its Life Flight helicopters. [DS, 7/11/87]

## **1990 to 1999**

1991 - Lebanon FD added full-service EMS operations. They purchased a 1991 \_\_\_\_/Wheeled Coach ambulance as their first unit. [LFD]

■ 1991 - DFD rescue truck body remounted onto new, four-door International chassis by Excellence Ambulance. Unit was equipped for patient transport and was used when all the EMS units were unavailable. It was remounted as the cab and chassis needed to be replaced, and not because the truck was involved in an accident. Sources: FAJ, DFDH. Note FAJ cites 1992 as year for remount, which appears to be incorrect.

1993, May - Durham EMS system was profiled in Durham Morning Herald. They average 2,000 emergency calls per month. The paramedics worked 12-hour shifts. The locations were:

- Lincoln Community Health Center - Three ambulances
- Durham Regional Hospital - Three ambulances
- Fulton Street near Duke University Hospital - Rescue base scheduled to open after July 1
- Bethesda FD - One paramedic daily, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.
- Lebanon FD - One paramedic daily, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.
- Parkwood FD - One paramedic daily, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Planned were the additions of a paramedic at **Redwood Fire Department** and a 24/7 paramedic at Parkwood. The system also had two BLS units for convalescent transport, operational from 8:30 a.m. to 11:30 p.m. daily. There were 96 full- and part-time employees. [DMH, 5/23/93]

■ 1993, Oct - DFD started First Responder program. Firefighters started responding to all life-threatening medical emergencies. [FAJ, HS, 5/24/00]

■ 1993, Dec - Durham rescue truck answered 1,695 runs during the year. Reports a news story, the department planned to alleviate the call load by training some of the ladder companies to handle high-level rescues from buildings. [DHS, 6/27/94]

1994 - **Duke University Rescue Squad** placed in service in spring, providing stand-by coverage at basketball games. By 1995, it expanded to responding to emergency calls.

■ 1995, Dec - DFD activated the Tactical Rescue Team at Station 5. They utilized a 1978 Ford C/1994 M&W box truck created from a former Ford C8000 pumper. Unit later moved to Station 9 for six months, before relocating to Station 7 for years. Team planned to be fully trained in areas of high-angle and trench rescues by July 1, 1996, and swift-water, confined space, and mass casualty by end of 1996. [ DMH, 1/22/17; OH]

■ 1996 - DFD started squad program, with Squad 1 activated as cross-staffed unit with two people from Ladder 1. First vehicle was a Chevy Blazer, former Battalion Chief's vehicle. Second vehicle was an old city Ford F-150 pick-up truck.

■ 1996 – Most DFD members became certified as EMT-D. [DHS, 5/24/00]

1997, June – DCEMS paramedic added at Bahama FD and rode the BFD ambulance. [DHS, 6/1/97]

■ 1997 - DFD Squad 7 activated, briefly. Personnel were soon transferred to newly activated Engine 14 at Station 7.

1998, Feb 18 - DCEMS activated fourth ambulance station, at old DFD Station 8 on Holloway Street. The facility had closed as a fire station in the summer of 1987. The location was recommended as a site in a 1989 study. The other stations were at Durham Regional Hospital, Duke University Medical Center, and Lincoln Health Center on Fayetteville Street. The building required about \$40,000 of repairs and improvement, including adding a fence around the rear parking lot, because the firefighters at the old station had had problems with their vehicles broken into. One of the system's six ambulances was relocated from the Duke station to the new facility. [DHS, 2/9/98]

1998, Jul 1 - Durham County assumed supervision of Durham County EMS, from Durham Regional Hospital on July 1, 1998. The change was the result of a merger between Durham Regional Hospital and Duke University Medical Center. The 130 employees of the EMS system became county employees, and Duke agreed to provide \$1.5M annually toward the EMS service for the next 20 years. [DHS, 7/1/98]

■ 1998 – DFD FD Rescue 11 renamed Rescue 1. [DFDH]

1999 – DCEMS bike team created by this time. [DHS, 6/1/01]

1999, June – DCEMS received approval to add two quick-response vehicles, SUVs to be operated by a shift supervisor and the other by a senior paramedic. The plans were included in the new fiscal year budget. DCEMS currently had six ALS ambulances inside the city, five ALS ambulances in the county—one at each volunteer fire station, and two BLS ambulances for convalescent transport. [DHS, 6/30/99]

## **2000 to 2009**

■ 2000, May - DFD rescue changes:

- Rescue 1 removed from service on May 22, 2000.
- Squad 1 assigned with dedicated personnel. They operated the old Rescue 1, a 1991 International with an older remounted Frontline ambulance body. Unit was re-lettered with "Squad 1".
- Squad 2 activated. They operated a former EMS unit.
- Squad 4 activated. They operated a former EMS unit.

- All three squads could transport patients if necessary.

Extrication equipment was added to all ladder trucks, from Rescue 1 and with newly purchased additional tools.

■ 2000, Jul - DFD squads started providing EMT-I service on July 1, 2000. DFD had three squads: Squad 1, Squad 2, and Squad 4. Each squad could also transport patients if needed. Between DFD and DCEMS, there were ten vehicles inside the city limits that could transport patients. DFD hoped to eventually have all firefighters training as EMT-I. [DHS, 5/24/00; DMH, 7/9/00]

2000, Jul - Major changes to Durham County EMS System were announced, the result of a year-long collaboration with local city and county fire departments. The group had three goals: improve EMS coverage in the county at night, improve coverage to the inner city, and improve EMS coverage for fast-growing southwestern Durham communities.

The planned actions of DCEMS:

- Provide a paramedic to the volunteer fire departments to enable night-time staffing. Currently only Parkwood FD had paramedic coverage 24/7. Also, PFD had recently agreed to become fully responsible for EMS coverage in southern Durham County, and would supply their own paramedics.
- Add a seventh daily ambulance in the fall, housed at DFD Station 5. This would provide coverage in an area that was having response-time problems.
- End convalescent transport service later that month. They handled 300 to 400 transports a month, mostly from local nursing homes. The service would be turned over to two private companies: **AAA Transport Inc.** and **Johnston Ambulance**.
- Expand office space within the next six months, moving its support services to another location, but leaving its main operations base at Durham Regional Hospital.
- Eventually acquire Lebanon FD's old fire station on Milton Road as a new EMS location.

DCEMS employed just over 100 people. [DMH, 7/9/00]

2000, Nov - DCEMS activated their seventh ambulance on November 15, 2000, housed at Durham Fire Station 5 on Chapel Hill Road. [DHS, 11/20/00]

2001, Aug – DCEMS purchase offer for the Lebanon FD station on Milton Road accepted by LVFD board of directors. [LFD] In July 2001, services were advertised for removing and expanding the building. [DHS, 7/15/01]

2003 - **Duke University EMS** renamed from Duke University Rescue Squad.

2003 – Snapshot. DCEMS answered more than 20,000 calls during the year and transported more than 4,500 to Durham Regional Hospital. [DHS, 9/23/04] They operated 11 ALS ambulances. Medics worked 12-hour shifts. There 132 paramedics employed. [DHS, 6/03/03]

■ 2003 or so - DFD received new squad vehicles, 2003 Chevrolet 2500/\_\_\_\_\_ utility trucks. They replaced the old Rescue 1 used by Squad 1, and the two former EMS units used by Squad 2 and Squad 4.

2005, Mar – Snapshot. DCEMS operated at least 11 ambulances each day. [DHS, 3/24/05]

■ 2005, Aug – New DCEMS director named, Assistant Director Mike Smith. He had been serving as interim director since the retirement of Mickey Tezai. Smith until June 30, 2013. [DHS, 8/25/05; DC news, 1/8/13]

2006, Jul – Snapshot. DCEMS answered 23,132 emergency calls during last 12 months and transported 14,313 patients. [DHS, 9/24/08]

2007, Apr - DCEMS relocated Station 2 to newly facility at 615 Fayetteville Street on April 26, 2007. Medic 8 and Medic 9 were relocated from the Lincoln Community Health Center. The 6,016 square-foot facility was equipped with five sleeping rooms, three ambulance bays, two offices, a kitchen, and a common area. The architect was Gurlitz Architectural Group of Durham, the builder was C. T. Williams Construction Company. The site once housed a bank and the underground vault was still present, which was filled with sand.

The old station received 26,000 calls per year. The old station had about 1,600 square-feet, including two bays for ambulances and a “dorm-like area” for the crew. The latter included an office, a lounge, a kitchenette, and a small bedroom with three bunk beds. [DHS, 11/1/01; HS, 3/20/07; HS 4/27/07]

■ 2007 - NC USAR Task Force 8 activated with DFD as a member department. DFD received one of four identical 2007 Ford F-550 Super Duty/\_\_\_\_\_ swift-water rescue units, equipped with walk-in utility body plus a boat trailer and equipment.

2007, Jul – Snapshot. DCEMS answered 25,111 emergency calls during last 12 months and transported 15,665 patients. [DHS, 9/24/08]

■ 2009 – DFD received second swift-water rescue truck delivered, 2009 Ford F-550/\_\_\_\_\_ with walk-in utility body. Designated Rescue 15 and staffed by Engine 15.

**2010 to 2019**

■ 2011 - DFD updated each of the three squad vehicles with new 2011 Ford F-250 Super Duty chassis. The utility bodies from the old trucks were remounted and updated with new paint, graphics, and lights.

2012 - DFD rescue changes:

- Squad 2 moved to Station 7.
- Tactical Rescue Team moved from Engine 7 to Ladder 2.

2012, Dec – Bahama FD and Bethesda FD both ended EMS service on December 31, 2012. DCEMS took over the response to their districts.

■ 2013, Jun – Skip Kirkwood hired as DCEMS director and Chief Paramedic. Served until June 2017.

2013, Jun- Redwood FD ended EMS service on June 31, 2013. DCEMS took over the response to their districts.

2013 - Parkwood FD ended EMS service. DCEMS took over the response area, with a transition period of about six months.

2013, Jul - Durham County Fire-Rescue started operations on July 1, 2013. They assumed the operations of Bethesda FD, including their facilities, apparatus, equipment, and personnel.

2015 – DCEMS added seven Mercedes Benz Sprinter/Demers Type 3 ambulances to the fleet. [JEMS, 2/23/15]

2015, July 1 - Parkwood FD ended operations. Durham County Fire-Rescue took over their operations and assets.

2015, fall/winter - DCEMS add a Major Incident Response Vehicle (MIRV), a 2015 Freightliner/Hackney medium-duty rescue with a four-person cab. It carried equipment for multi-patient incidents, as well as a generator and light tower, and other emergency equipment. [Legeros blog, 1/24/16]

2017 – DCEMS started Community Paramedic program. They were medics who received extra training to serve more vulnerable populations such as patients with a history of substance use, elder patients with chronic medical conditions, and patients with psychiatric concerns. The units were named CP-1 and CP-2 and each operated Ford Expeditions. [DHS, 12/21/17]

■ 2018, Jul - Durham County Fire-Rescue merged with Durham FD on July 1, 2018. The city received nearly all pieces of county fire apparatus including a former Parkwood heavy

rescue and a former Bethesda heavy rescue. While operated by the county, neither truck was staffed as a rescue company, nor did they routinely respond to incidents. The city assigned the two county rescue trucks as future Rescue 1 at Station 1 and a haz-mat support unit at Station 16.

■ 2019, Nov - Durham FD re-activated Rescue 1 as a fully-staffed fire company on November 16, 2019. The 2006 Spartan Diamond/EVI walk-around heavy rescue formerly served Durham County Fire-Rescue, Parkwood FD, and originally served Orange Rescue Squad in Hillsborough.

2019, Jul – Construction bidding advertised for new DCEMS Station 1 on Stadium Drive. The 10,420 square-foot building replaced an older structure on the same site. [DHS, 7/7/19]

■ 2023, Nov – New DCEMS chief paramedic named, Mark Lockhart, who started on November 30, 2020. He served until April 2024, when he was promoted to Director of the Office of Emergency Services.

2023, Jan – DCEMS released statement in response to news reports of problems of ambulance unavailability in the system. It noted that DCEMS had about 140 medics staffing 14-16 ambulances during the daytime over the last 12 months, including six peak-hour trucks during the busiest times of day, and 7-8 units overnight. Ideally, they would staff 18 units during the day and 12 at night. The reasons for the reductions were two-fold, shortage of mechanics to manage their ambulances, and supply chain issues that have impacted the timely delivery of parts and extended the average build time for new ambulances from 140-180 days, pre-pandemic, to 720 days or two years. [WTVD, 1/18/23]

■ 2024, Apr – Interim DCEMS chief paramedic and director named, Deputy Chief Gordon Scott Smith.

2024, Sep – DCEMS added five new Braun Liberty Type I modular ambulances to the fleet and that helped address the problem of limited availability of ambulances, and for reasons including the need for major repairs of vehicles. Three more news ambulances were expected in December and eleven more by 2027. [WTVD, 9/1/24]

## **Sources**

- DFD – Durham Fire Department
- DHS – Durham Herald-Sun
- DMH – Durham Morning Herald
- DS – Durham Sun
- FAJ – Fire Apparatus Journal, January-February 1997, Profile of Durham, NC by Glenn D. Leggett



- Oral histories
- Etc.