

Charlotte and Mecklenburg County Ambulance Service History

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1910 to 1939

1919 – “Charlotte must have an ambulance service” said a doctor in a “quoting the public” column. The city needs no fewer than two such units, ready for emergency calls, available at all times. [CN, 7/20/19]

1921 – Advertisements for local ambulance services appeared in local newspapers. None found in 1920 newspapers or earlier. Operators included Blakes Auto Service and Rogers Auto Taxi Company. [CO, 5/22/21; 10/30/21]

1925 –Yellow Cab taxi company expanded their services with an ambulance. [CO, 7/9/25]

1926 – Funeral homes begin purchasing ambulances. Z. A. Hovis & Son advertised the start of a service in August 1926. [CO, 9/2/26] Douglas & Sing advertised ambulance service in September 1926. [CO, 9/8/26].

1940 to 1959

1941, June – Editorial that the city should give serious consideration to addressing the “ambulance situation.” Current services were from funeral homes, four white-owned and two black-owned. They were staffed with men trained in first aid, not physicians. Most operated at a financial loss. City had grown, they opined, and ambulance services should be under the supervision of a hospital. [CN, 6/28/41]

1947, Apr – Charlotte Life Saving and First Aid Crew organized. Local transport firm donated a tract of land for a crew hall, beside 1001 S. Clarkson Street. Organization would be supported by public subscription. Volunteer organization, no paid members. With a roster of 25 active and ten honorary members. [CH, 7/10/47]

1948, Jun – Life Saving Crew has an iron lung by this time, acquired about a year ago. But money was owed and if the remaining balance could not be paid, it would be returned to the manufacturing. [CN, 6/1/48]

1950, Sep – Police and ambulance companies emphatically denied allegations of

discriminations when white-owned (McEwen Funeral Service, Douglas & Sing funeral home, Hankins-Whitting Funeral Home, Z. A. Hovis & Sons Funeral Home) and black-owned (Grier & Thompson Funeral Parlor, Davidson Brothers Funeral Home, Alexander Funeral Home) funeral home ambulances were called during emergencies. They responded to calls regardless of victim race, the funeral homes said, and almost always without that information at the time of dispatch. [CN, 9/12/50]

1950, Dec – Life Saving Crew appealed to city council for financial aid. They're the only such organization in the county and they needed money to continue operation. They had saved 33 lives since they started and answered 132 calls in 1950. [CN, 12/27/50]

1950, Dec – Fire chief asked city council to give serious consideration to forming a “rescue emergency squad” in the fire department. He would need a minimum of four men added per shift. He made his remarks after the Life Saving Crew made their appeal to council for funding. [CN, 12/27/50]

1952, Oct – Life Saving Crew had been working in close cooperation with the Polio Foundation to supply and maintain iron lungs in Charlotte. The Life Saving Crew had the first iron lung in the city. [CO, 10/2/52]

1954, May – Mecklenburg Medical Society recommended to city council that ambulances be required to observe prevailing speed limits unless they had a police escort. TBD if the request was codified into law. [CO, 11/29/56]

1955, Jun – Life Saving Crew sought a large truck to transport their iron lung(s). They currently had two trucks, but they were not large enough. The organization was self-funded, though the city paid for their fuel. [CN, 6/2/55]

1955, Jun 9 – Davidson Brothers Funeral Home ambulance collided with three cars at the intersection of Mint and Morehead streets. One woman, 54, was killed, and her husband was critically injured. City officials subsequently raised the issue of making ambulances observe all traffic regulations. They were currently permitted to disregard traffic signals in emergencies. [CO, 6/10/55]

1956, Nov 19 – McEwen Funeral Home ambulance was struck by a City Coach bus at the intersection of Fourth and McDowell streets, while on an emergency call. Three other vehicles were involved and the ambulance overturned. Five people received minor injuries. [CO, 11/20/56]

1957 – Carolina Medical Services Inc. started operating a new division in Charlotte. The owner was William S. Aiken, who operated Durham Medical Ambulance Service. The office was at 1527 Elizabeth Avenue. It started with six ambulance technicians from the Durham

operation plus local drivers who knew the city. The service ended in about six weeks. [CN, 1/09/60, 1/15/60]

1958, Apr – Life Saving Crew was criticized after two young children drowned in a rain-flood culvert under construction on the new US 29 bypass. The Life Saving Crew arrived but with inadequate equipment and too late to save the children's lives. One problem was that their equipment was not centrally located. The squad operated a 1951 Pontiac station wagon, a 1948 ambulance, and a 1950 sedan—the latter or all three subject to recall by local Civil Defense—plus a boat and motor. The squad has about 24 men who are on call 24/7. Last year, then answered over 300 calls. [CO, 4/17/58]

1958, Apr – Life Saving Crew received a new ambulance donated by the Exchange Club of Charlotte. The new ambulance was not yet equipped, but the club believed the donation should be made now, after the recent incident. The gift had been a project of the club for the last six months, with fundraising including participation by the Charlotte News. [CN, 4/18/58]

1958, Apr – Snapshot. Though the fire chief's request in 1952 for a fire department rescue squad was rejected, CFD had resuscitators in chief's car, however those cars were not authorized to operate outside the city. They relied on the Life Saving Crew, which had "three dilapidated vehicles with hand-me-down two-way radios which are worn out" as well as a "boat with grappling hooks and aqualung." But the Life Saving Crew had no operating headquarters, no central place to store equipment. Thus, when they had a recent drowning call was received, the boat was across town in the garage of the squad chief's mother. [CO, 4/18/58]

1958, Apr – Fire chief proposed a ten-man rescue squad for the fire department, with three men on duty around the clock. They would be assigned to full-time rescue work and would need a large truck to carry equipment. He said this would cost around \$15,000 equipped. The request was later rejected. [CN, 4/18/58]

1958, Apr – Life Saving Crew received new Plymouth station wagon donated by the Charlotte Exchange Club. It would be used as an ambulance, once equipped. [CN, 4/19/57]

1958, Apr – Snapshot. Charlotte's rescue services were poor compared to other southeastern cities:

- Atlanta – The rescue squad had been an integral part of AFD for eight years. Two men and two vehicles were always on duty.

- Richmond – The rescue squad had long been a part of RFD and last July was expanded to ambulance service. Three men and three vehicles were on duty around the clock.
- Raleigh – The rescue squad was a combination of volunteer members plus paid firemen who operated two vehicles and a boat. Calls were answered immediately with firemen responding, and volunteers were called by phone to follow.
- Greensboro – The rescue squad was a combination of volunteer plus paid firemen assigned to the vehicles. Volunteers supplemented on-duty personnel.
- Winston-Salem – All-volunteer organization with its own building and United Fund support. Calls were relayed through WSFD.
- Knoxville – The rescue squad was a combination system of volunteers and firemen. KFD also had an ambulance service that provided assistance.

1958 – During the year, committees met and studies were made on how to improve funding for the Life Saving Crew, including recommendations that they be supported by public funds. Governance and ownership of a tax-supported organization was also discussed. But no actions were taken and private fundraising continues and is continued to be required.

1959 – North Mecklenburg Volunteer Rescue Squad created in Huntersville. [NMRS]

1960 to 1969

1960, Jan – Mayor’s committee created to study the city’s ambulance service. The committee was named after council members heard complaints from representatives of an event at the coliseum, where a young woman collapsed and died. The complaints were about the private ambulance service. The committee considered proposing regulations that included minimum standards of equipment and training, and controlling the speed of ambulance travel. [CN, 1/15/60]

1960, Jan 25 – The city’s funeral directors informed city council that they want out of the emergency ambulance business by March 1. They cited two reasons: (1) it’s a losing business proposition, and (2.) they have been subject of continued criticism of their methods of operation. They also recommended that all emergency ambulance functions should be controlled by a centralized agency, either as a function of city government or by a private enterprise, perhaps under a city franchise or license. [CO, 1/26/60] The date was later changed to April 1. [CO, 3/20/60]

1960, Feb 24 – By this time, the city had received offers to provide centralized ambulance services in Charlotte, including from Lowell A. Voorhees, who operated a service in Roanoke, VA. [CN, 2/24/60]

1960, Mar 20 – City council planned a discussion on Monday to talk over steps to establish a “central private ambulance service” for the city. Robby Brandes, “a local truck renter,” sought to start the service. He would take over for the white-owned funeral homes, each ending all ambulance service by April 1. The city’s black-owned funeral homes would continue to operate non-emergency ambulance service. Future actions that were needed included a city licensing law to regulate ambulance service in the city, state legislative authority to franchise ambulance services in the city, and a guarantee by the city for financial reimbursement for a portion of unpaid bills, [CO, 3/20/60]

1960, Mar 22 – City council received and heard on Monday:

- That the white-owned funeral home wanted to end their ambulance services as soon as possible.
- That the black-owned funeral homes wanted to end emergency ambulance service as soon as possible, but continue non-emergency operations.
- Proposal from businessman Roddy Brandt to start a centralized ambulance service. It was presented by councilman Gibson Smith, chairman of a committee that had been studying the ambulance service problem.

Brandt asked for:

- City seek legislative authority to franchise ambulance service.
- City pass a licensing law that sets standards for ambulance service.
- City give guarantee of payment for at least 100 calls per month, for those placed by city agencies, for which Brandt cannot collect the fee.
- Request to county government add ambulance costs to those hospital costs that the county pays for charity cases. [CO, 3/22/60]

1960, July 10 – Ambulance Service of Charlotte, Inc. started operating. It had six new ambulances and a crew of 27 men. They answered both inside and outside the city limits. The fees were \$12.50 for daytime and \$13.50 for night calls. The city would reimburse for unpaid calls at \$10 each. The owner was Roddy Brandes, a local business man who had researched operations in Richmond, Baltimore, DC, Philadelphia, and several New Jersey cities. [CN, 2/24/60, 4/2/60, 7/9/60]

1960, Nov 11 – Roddy Brandes told the Chamber of Commerce health committee that his company needed legislation to make people pay bills or his ambulance service might be forced out of business. In the first fourth months, they served 1,718 people and 743 did not pay. The company had two types of customers, service as requested by police, which the city guaranteed payment if the bill is not paid, and service for private callers, which the

company had no means of making pay, nor received reimbursement from the city. [CN, 11/17/60]

1961, Feb 20 – Life Saving Crew asked city council for clarification in the squad's role, now that the new ambulance service was operating. Council asked the squad's chief to meet with the ambulance service owner and work out the problem. One issue is that the squad answers call for free that the ambulance service could collect for. One idea is that the squad only answer calls for rescue operations and special emergencies. But said the squad chief, if the Life Saving Crew were prevented from answering emergency calls, they would lose public support and have to get more city aid. [CN, 2/21/61]

1961, Aug – South Mecklenburg Life Saving and Rescue Crew, Inc., was organized. They received their state charter on July 31, 1961. Most of the members were volunteer firemen. The group was created to help with the persistent problem of accidents on the Catawba River. They planned to (1.) procure a panel truck and eventually a car, (2.) arrange with five boat dealers to have a watercraft in the river and ready when the crew needs to respond to an accident, and (3.) move into Steele Creek Station 2 as their headquarters. They hoped to be operating within a month. [CN, 8/5/61]

1961 – The ambulance service and rescue squad reached an agreement to keep each group from “overlapping into each other's realms.” The Charlotte Life Saving Crew would answer calls requiring immediate rescue efforts, while the ambulance service would be responsible for transporting people to and from medical attention. Centralizing the dispatch of both services would be worked out. The Charlotte Life Saving Crew was called by the fire department, while the ambulance service was called by the police department. [CO, 8/22/61]

1961, Sep – Construction was being completed on a new Charlotte Life Saving Crew headquarters at 230 W. Summit Street. It would be ready in about 90 days. Cost of the project was about \$15,000, with most of the amount donated by Charlotte businesses and labor unions. [CN, 9/11/61]

1961 – City council approved ordinance that established Ambulance Service of Charlotte, Inc. as a franchised company, and granted legal authority to take criminal action against those capable of paying bills but refuse to pay. [CO, 11/28/61]

1962, Jul 2 – UMECK Rescue Squad reported as now operating, after efforts over about two months. Billy Hunt was the chief. They were headquartered at the Indian Trail post office and operated a state wagon. By July 4, they also expected to have their ambulance operating, which they purchased from CLSC. [CO, 7/2/62]

1962, Oct – By this time, the Charlotte Life Saving Crew had formed a ladies auxiliary, organized about a year ago. Their main work was standing by at any emergency to service coffee and help with minor accidents. [CO, 10/10/62]

1966, Jul 1 - North Mecklenburg Volunteer Rescue Squad took over ambulance service in the Davidson, Huntersville, and Cornelius areas. This followed an announcement in May that Cathey-Hoyle Funeral Home of Davidson and Cavin Funeral Home of Huntersville that both were ending their ambulance business by July 1, when Medicare went into effect. Both companies donated their ambulances to the community. They also promised to lend one full-time driver each to the new squad, until full-time personnel could be hired. Funding sources were expected to be \$4,000 from the county that year, \$6,000 from the towns of Davidson, Cornelius, and Huntersville that year, and \$6,000 expected from charges for service trips. [CN, 6/30/66; CO, 7/19/66]

1966 - North Mecklenburg Ambulance Service began operation. Formed by members of North Mecklenburg Volunteer Rescue Squad, it was a paid organization that provided daytime EMS and rescue coverage, while the volunteer rescue squad answered calls at night. [NMRS]

1968 – Steele Creek VFD started providing ambulance service. [CO, 6/13/77]

1969, Nov – City council told the city manager to study ways of operating a public emergency ambulance service. The report was released in January 1970. It recommended that the current private ambulance service be kept, but if the city decided to create their own, the police department was the best location for them. He favored police instead of fire, because the police communications system was better for handling ambulance calls. [CO, 1/18/70]

1969, Nov 3 – City manager directed by council to draft a plan that would provide for city-operated emergency ambulance service by July 1. [CO, 1/10/70]

1969, Nov – Charlotte Fire Chief Walter Black asked his department to prepare a plan to have CFD operate an ambulance service. This followed a Chamber of Commerce report that summer which recommended the city create an emergency ambulance service in the fire department and place ambulances at various fire stations. The resulting plan said that ambulances could be added at five fire stations, and three more stations could be used later. And it would take about six months to place the ambulances in service, once CFD received council approval. The plan called for 39 ambulance attendants led by an officer with a rank equal to deputy chief. The division would also have a clerk and a mechanic. Five ambulances would be operating 24/7, plus a sixth in reserve. [CO, 1/18/70]

1970 to 1979

1970, Jan – Results released of a study conducted by City Manager William Veeder. The study was requested last fall by councilman Jerry Tuttle, who requested an evaluation of Charlotte's ambulance service. The report said:

- Charlotte should continue to use a private-operated service, rather than starting a city-run service.
- Consider raising rates by \$5 above the current \$20 charge.
- Increase city subsidies to the private service.

The city manager also issued a second report that said:

- City-run service would cost an estimated \$270,000 per year, or three cents on tax rate.
- If such a service were established, it should be a civilian-staffed operation that's run through the police department.

1970, Dec – Charlotte Ambulance Advisory Board presented the results of a four-month study to city council. They found major areas of deficiency in the ambulance service, which should be corrected immediately. They stem from insufficient training, inadequate pay, excessive employee turnover, and inadequate intermediate management.

They recommended the following:

- Ambulance attendants attend a nationally developed EMT course that will be offered at Central Piedmont Community College starting in January.
- City code changed to require that each ambulance have at least one person who has completed the course.
- That pay scales for attendants be raised.
- That the company undertake an internal review.
- That CAS employees do not perform any collection efforts at the same time they are rendering emergency service.
- Increase rates and subsidies, such as raising the basic one-way trip cost from \$20 to \$25.
- Create new subsidies, for some types of uncollectible emergency calls, as well as calls requested by fire or police but with no patient transport.
- No change to ambulance station locations.
- Establish an ambulance authority agency, an independent, non-profit, quasi-public entity, and that agency govern the county ambulance service. [CH, 12/1/70]

1973, Jun – Newspaper profile of Sue Brisley, only female member of the ambulance service. [CO, 6/19/73]

1973, summer – County commissioners agreed relieve the city for the responsibility of ambulance service as soon as the city’s contract with CAS expired on December 20. [CO, 12/16/74]

1973, Dec 26 – More than 100 volunteers from six counties and 20 ambulances transferred patients from old Gaston Memorial Hospital to the new facility five miles across town. Rescue squads and life saving crews assisted from Gaston, Cleveland, Lincoln, Mecklenburg, and Cabarrus counties, plus York County in South Carolina. The first patient left at 8:10 a.m. and the last patient left at 12:58 p.m. [CO, 12/27/73]

1974 – Mint Hill ambulance service started. [CN, 2/8/74]

1974, Aug – Headline, “No Change in Ambulance Service / 5 Years Later, After 5 Major Studies” [CO, 8/13/74]

1974, Dec 16 – County assumed responsibility for county-wide ambulance service, but postponed for two days a decision to contract with the current provider, Charlotte Ambulance Service (CAS). County officials agreed last summer to “take over the ambulance service from city government” but made the action official at a Monday meeting by holding a public hearing, passing a resolution, and adopting regulations for setting standards for ambulances operating under a county franchise. Among the alternatives they were considering was establishing a county-owned, county-operated service, or establishing their own service for non-emergency calls and contracting with a private company for emergency service, or continue to use private companies but with substantial subsidies to improve service. [CO, 12/17/74]

1974, Dec 20 – Charlotte Ambulance Service, Inc., began operating with a new contract with the county. At the request of county officials, they are also renamed and soon started calling their company Mecklenburg Emergency Medical Service (MEMS). [CO, 12/19/74]

1977 – Snapshot. Ambulance providers were:

County-franchised:

MEMS (three stations)

Mint Hill VFD (two trucks)

North Mecklenburg Ambulance Inc. (three trucks)

Volunteer services that overlap with MEMS:

Charlotte Life Saving and Rescue Squad (four trucks)

Newell VFD (one truck)
North Mecklenburg RS (three trucks)
Pineville Fire/Rescue (one truck)
Steele Creek VFD (one truck)
U Meck RS (three trucks)
Wilkinson Boulevard VFD (one truck)

Where those response areas overlapped, only MEMS could transport victims with serious injuries. [CO, 7/11/77]

1978, Jan – County doctors asked the county to delay starting a long-planned paramedic program, due to serious questions about the quality of care by the four ambulances services and six rescue squads in the county.” [CO, 1/18/78]

1978, May – County officials cancelled contract with MEMS, after studying complaints about the service and concluding that the service was inadequate. Though they negotiated with the owner of MEMS for the county to purchase the company, the two parties were unable to reach an agreement. [CN, 11/1/78]

1978, Oct – New county ambulance named MEDIC prepared to start service on November 1. The director of the new service was Frank Hoffmeister. As of October 12, they had hired 32 EMTs and eight dispatchers, and most would start work on October 25. They’ve hired eight employees of MEMS. Four ambulances will answer emergency calls, and three others will be used primarily for convalescent transport. [CO, 10/12/78]

1978, Nov 1 – MEDIC began operation and MEMS continued operating, even though their contract was cancelled. [CN, 11/2/78]

1978 – By this time, Charlotte Fire had started their first responder program. By July 1979, said the fire chief in July 1978, almost all firefighters will have completed their EMT training. [CO, 10/12/78]

1980 to 1989

1984, Apr 2 – MEDIC ended convalescent service.

1984, May – The Charlotte Memorial Hospital and Medical Center Auxiliary donated a \$25,000 ambulance for use in convalescent transports for patients in facilities run by the

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Hospital Authority. The ambulance would be used for transfers between six facilities. [CN/ 5/11/84]

1984 – Char-Meck Ambulance Service founded by Sarah and Dempsey Brooks and with two ambulances. They performed convalescent transport and on rare occasions, providing back-up emergency ambulance service for MEDIC. [CO, 6/19/98; OH]

1984, Oct – Snapshot of MEDIC. They had five stations in Charlotte with 50 field personnel and 50 part-time technicians who are on “24 call.” MEDIC answers 24,000 calls annually. [CP, 10/18/84]

1985, Nov – News reported that Char-Meck Ambulance Service acquired competitor Carolina Medi-Car Corporation, which was formed three years ago. They were located at 1900 E. Independent Boulevard. The acquisition added four ambulances to the Char-Meck fleet of five. [CN, 11/1/85]

1989, Apr 1 - North Mecklenburg Ambulance Service ended operations. Its service area was taken over by MEDIC and most of their employees were hired by MEDIC. The transition was first proposed ten years earlier. They had four ambulances and covered 105 square-miles. [CO, 4/9/89]

1990 to 1999

1995, Aug – American Medical Response (AMR) acquired Char-Meck Ambulance Service. [CO, 6/19/98]

1995 – Snapshot. That year, MEDIC had 21 ambulances, 102 full-time paramedics, a budget of \$8.9M million, averaged 11 minutes responding to emergencies, and answered 48,000 calls. [CO, 5/12/02]

1996, Jan – Blue-ribbon committee started a study of the county ambulance system. MEDIC operated 10 stations with an average of 14 ambulances in operation. They covered 519 square-miles and answered 48,000 calls last year. But the system was overwhelmed and their units reached 90 percent of their patients in less than 16 minutes, versus the recommended time of under nine minutes. Based on the study, county staff would propose five solutions: (1.) no change, (2.) merge with Charlotte Fire, (3.) let a private company run it, (4.) let a local hospital run it, or (5.) let an independent authority run it. [CO, 1/4/96]

1996, Oct 8 – County began contracting with new MEDIC agency, named Mecklenburg EMS Agency, Inc. They took control of the county’s existing fleet and stations along with most of its EMS equipment and supplies. All current employees were offered jobs with no loss of salary or benefits. The new agency was governed by a seven-member board, with three

officials from the owners of Carolinas Medical Center, three officials from the owners of Presbyterian Hospital, and one county official. [CO, 8/28/96]

1997, Aug – MEDIC equipped Charlotte firefighters and volunteer rescue squads with 60 defibrillators. [CO, 10/6/97]

1997, Dec – MEDIC signed lease to build new headquarters at 4525 Statesville Road. The 56,000 square-foot, one-story building would house the dispatch center, training facilities, equipment storage, administrative offices, and areas for parking and serving the fleet. MEDIC was presently housed in a portion of several county-owned buildings, with the primary office at 618 N. College Street. [CO, 12/14/97]

1998, Sep – MEDIC began moving to new headquarters on September 22, 1998. [CO, 9/17/98]

1998, Jan – MEDIC now fined \$10 per minute each time an ambulance takes longer than 11 minutes to respond to life-threatening emergencies. [CO, 12/14/97]

1999, Jul 1 – The Charlotte Life Saving Crew ceased operations, after their county contract was not renewed. After losing their funding, the group decided to disband. They operated two ambulances and one rescue truck. [CO, 7/3/99, 7/11/99]

1999 – Fire departments in Gilead and Cornelius added EMS and rescue services to their programs and began providing fire and rescue services for their respective areas. [NMRS]

2000 to present

2002 – MEDIC started an initiative to equip all police patrol cars in the county with automatic defibrillators. Each cost \$1,400. By March 2004, Huntersville units were equipped, Matthews police were halfway toward the goal, Pineville and Charlotte-Mecklenburg police were planning to do the same, and Davidson and Cornelius police were “already on board.” [CO, 3/22/04]

2002, May – Snapshot. In 2001, MEDIC had 40 ambulances, 183 full-time paramedics, an \$18.6M annual budget, averages 7.5 minutes to emergency calls, and answered 72,000 calls. [CO, 5/12/02]

2009, Nov – Mint Hill VFD sought contributions to refurbish two ambulances, which had worn out faster than expected due to increased calls. MHVFD offered paramedic-level EMS service at no cost. [CO, 11/28/07]

2017, Jun 30 - North Mecklenburg Volunteer Rescue Squad ceased answering emergency

calls. They planned to transition their organization into a charitable foundation. [NMRS]

2019, Aug 13 – Mint Hill ceased ambulance operations on August 13, 2019, at 7:00 a.m.
[OH]

Sources

- CN – Charlotte News
- CO – Charlotte Observer
- NMRS – North Mecklenburg Rescue Squad web site,
<http://www.northmeckrescue.org>
- OH – Oral History