

Winter Park to purchase ambulance

By Yvonne C.T. Vassel

OF THE SENTINEL STAFF

WINTER PARK — Spurred by a \$20,000 donation from a Winter Park resident, the city will buy a new \$50,000 ambulance for use by the fire department.

The move spelled a victory for the department's emergency rescue personnel who recently went public with their complaints about the unique rescue pumpers the city currently uses.

Winter Park has two custom-designed firefighting pumper trucks, each with a special compartment to transport a patient. The rescue pumpers were designed by former fire chief Mike Molthop as an efficiency measure.

Paramedics complained the vehicles are dangerous because there is only one exit from the patient compartment and because it is difficult to work on a patient in the cramped compartment. In addition, they say the rescue pumpers are slow.

Recently, rescue personnel worked on a heart attack victim outside the truck because there was not enough room to maneuver in the compartment. As a result, an electronic heart monitor was damaged, and some drugs and instruments were contaminated by rain.

The ambulance will replace a truck the department uses to carry equipment for extricating victims of vehicle accidents. But because of the design of the ambulance there is a limit to the size and type of equipment it will be able to carry, said assistant fire chief Larry Grainger.

The rescue pumpers also have limited space.

"Unfortunately the space available on our rescue pumpers makes it difficult, if not impossible, to carry all the equipment which the most up-to-date paramedic services requires," said a Sept. 22 memo from City Manager David Harden to the city commission.

Harden said sometimes there are delays before Rural-Metro ambulances arrive at the scene of emer-

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gencies. When a delay in getting someone to a hospital may be critical, paramedics need a proper transport vehicle, he said.

"I am told that even though Rural-Metro has more units assigned to Orange County than their contract with the county requires, due to the growth of the area, there are several occasions each month when patients have waited 15 to 30 minutes for a Rural-Metro unit to arrive on the scene," Harden said.

Because of the Orange County Department of Emergency Medical Services contract with Rural-Metro, the new fire department ambulance will only transport patients when a Rural-Metro ambulance is not available.

Harden said there are two concerns that cause paramedics to wait at a scene for Rural-Metro when a delay would justify transporting the patient. Those are:

- If a patient's condition worsens on the way to a hospital and an endotracheal tube is needed to assist in breathing, the paramedic would not be able to do the procedure in a rescue pumper because there is no space to position himself at the patient's head.

- The rescue-pumper has a crew of three and sometimes they are all needed to work on a heart attack victim.

Louis Salado, paramedic training officer, said acting fire chief Raymond Beary, who is the city's long-time police chief, is to be thanked for encouraging the city to buy the ambulance.

"I think it's a step in the right direction and I'm just glad the city went along with it. It definitely will improve services. We mainly rely on Rural-Metro but it will give us the opportunity that if we have to transfer the patient we will be able to do it. As far as our morale as firefighters, it will improve it. It's an incentive," said Salado.

Beary said he was having lunch with Quality College owner Philip Crosby recently and told him of the city's need for a new rescue unit.

"He [Crosby] said he would donate \$20,000 toward buying the unit and I said 'I'll take it' before he changed his mind. I didn't try to up the ante," said Beary. "We're very fortunate to have the citizenry in this town who will do this type of thing."

Harden told the commission the balance of the money will come from the vehicle replacement account in the 1987 budget but it means another city vehicle scheduled to be replaced will have to be "nursed along" for another year.

Grainger said it will be several months before the new vehicle is delivered.

Orl Sent 9/26/86