

Winter Park examines role of backup rescue workers

By SHARON CARRASCO

the little sentinel

WINTER PARK — Ten years ago, the city's firefighters used a converted Dodge van when they rushed to help heart attack and accident victims.

There was no such thing as a paramedic program.

Firefighters were trained to fight fires. Their knowledge of first aid was limited to cardiopulmonary resuscitation and bandaging wounds.

With population growth and increasing traffic on city streets, the fire department has watched the number of calls soar from about 600 in 1972 to an estimated 3,000 calls for 1982.

Firefighting now has taken a back seat to rescue calls, largely because of the city's successful fire prevention program, said Assistant Fire Chief Mike Molthop. About 70 percent of all calls are medical-related emergencies.

The old Dodge van is long gone. Paramedics now are state-certified and use drugs with multisyllable names and sophisticated lifesaving equipment. The well-stocked rescue vehicles are emergency rooms on wheels.

To speed up response time and meet call demands, the city last fall spent an estimated \$180,000 to acquire two new prototype fire trucks that combine firefighting and rescue operations.

"We are nothing like we were 10 years ago," said Molthop, who started as a Winter Park firefighter in 1972. "We can't afford to be. We have to keep changing and adjusting to the times, demands, new equipment and manpower."

Last week the city's civil ser-

vice board suggested the city take one more step toward change and examine its reserve program, which is now oriented mainly toward firefighting.

In addition to 33 full-time firefighters, the city has eight reserves who respond to fires when called and are paid on an hourly basis.

"The city hasn't addressed the problem of what kind of reserve program do you have when you have more rescue calls than fire calls," said Jim Moreland, civil service board chairman.

Moreland said city commissioners should decide whether it would be more advantageous to have a rescue-oriented or fire reserve program.

Three of the city's eight reserves have completed their EMT (emergency medical training) or the first level of paramedic training.

Some reserves had complained to the civil service board that they weren't being called out often enough to fight fires. Board members met Tuesday to discuss that complaint and others raised by firefighters and paramedics.

Reserves with EMT training are especially needed now since the fire department has lost four of its six paramedics to other jobs or resignations, fire officials say.

Fire Chief Sid Ballou said reserves who have some paramedic training would better serve the needs of the full-time firefighters and paramedics.

"I think it is probably a good direction," said Ballou. Reserves "are going to augment the needs of the department. Our needs are rescue capabilities."

The fire department now requires all full-time firefighters to have their EMT certification by their second year of employment.

Reserves aren't required to have any medical training. They must, however, meet the minimum state standards for firefighting by the end their first year.

Ed Smith, a reserve who has applied for a firefighting position with the city, said reserves should at least know advanced first aid and cardio-pulmonary resuscitation.

But he added that reserves are "second stringers" and usually aren't the first to arrive at an accident scene unless they happen to be at the fire department when the call comes in.

"I feel better that I know it," said Smith. "If I see an accident and am first on the scene, at least I can do something and not just stand there."

Guy Ellis, a reserve for the past 27 years, said some of the reserves have first aid knowledge but few are state-certified EMTs.

With rescue calls outnumbering fire calls, Ellis agreed the reserves with EMT training could better serve the fire department. But reserves, he complained, aren't being called out for fires now.

The EMT course, taught at Seminole Community College, lasts 196 hours and costs \$36, which is paid by the fire department if the employee completes the course.

"EMT training costs a lot of money and takes a lot of hours," said Ellis. "... you can't expect a man who's not getting anything back for it to spend all that time and money."