WEMS recognized for service to campus

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Last Thursday, Willamette Emergency Medical Services was recognized by the Salem Fire Department for responding to emergency care calls throughout the campus. The award was given during one of WEMS’ annual briefings by members of the Salem Fire Department.

Salem firefighter and paramedic Jennifer Fraley, who presented the award, addressed WEMS personnel. "We just wanted to do something a little special to say ‘thank you’," she said. "You guys have been very helpful and very professional."

Fraley praised WEMS for reducing the number of on-campus calls for the Salem FD emergency response by about 90 percent since 1997, according to estimates. "(That) is a great help for the community because it makes us available for other people and other calls," she said.

According to the Director of WEMS, senior Kyle Soler, the organization has saved the university well over $100,000 in costs over the last eight years that would have come from transporting students via the Salem Fire Department’s ambulance service. He said students would have had to pay for those fees if WEMS and Campus Safety did not transport injured people on campus.

WEMS, a licensed emergency medical care agency, was inspired by these considerations for the welfare of the campus. In 1997, students came together to form the group with the help of Campus Safety Director Ross Stout. WEMS is substantially funded by ASWU for medical supplies. ASWU also funds $100 scholarships for students who are certified first responders or EMTs and who make a commitment of two semesters in volunteer service.

This year, WEMS staff includes eight first responders and four EMTs. WEMS has two first responders, immediately recognizable by the large medical backpacks they carry, on call at all times. An EMT-Basic supervisor working in or around the Campus Safety office stands by to assist in urgent cases.

Sophomore Michelle Monnie took the first responder course last spring. Interested in becoming a doctor, she thought that working in the service would be beneficial. "I thought it would be a good experience," she said. "And it’s also pretty exciting when you get a call."

Assistant Director MaryEllen Toomer, a senior, said that while many of the volunteers this year are pre-med students, it hasn’t always been this way. "We’ve had history majors, English majors and others who are not pursuing medicine or emergency care as a career work for us," she said.

Toomer obtained her first responder certification through an accelerated course here at Willamette. Another course will be available during the spring semester and will cost around $250 dollars. There is also an effort to get Chemeketa Community College to provide closed-circuit TV classes for EMT-Basic certification at the university, she said.

This semester has been relatively uneventful thus far in terms of emergency calls, Toomer said. "Hopefully it means people are taking care of themselves," she said, noting that WEMS responds to alcohol-related calls. As of November 14, WEMS has received 12 calls this semester, significantly lower than the 40 calls for last semester.

Monnie and other first responders want students to know that they should not refrain from calling for help in alcohol-related emergencies for fear of being cited in violation of residence hall rules. "Nobody gets written up unless you’re being belligerent," she said. "Don’t hesitate to call for any reason."