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# Laurens County 911: The first line for help

By **PAYTON TOWNS III**

When there is an emergency, no matter how small or big, the Laurens County 911 Center is the first number to call for help.

In 2017, the Dublin Police Department responded to 104,283 calls while the Laurens County Sheriff's Office responded to 56,735. East Dublin Police Department received 5,905.

"Fifty-seven percent of our calls went to law enforcement," said Russ Palmer, 911 director.

EMS received 9,399, while rural fire department had 4,528 and the Dublin Fire Department responded to 1,268 calls.

"EMS will go to all of the normal medical calls and rural fire department responds to all of the medical and fire related calls in the county," Palmer said.

In 2017, Laurens County 911 received a total of 157,307 calls. They received 53,771 911 calls and 53,175 calls to the 911 administrative office. They also had 6,079 hang up calls.

"We walk around and hear people who have accidentally called us and have their phone in their pocket," Palmer said. "You can hear the pants swooshing. We'll listen to make sure they are not under duress."

911 Supervisor Becca Cox enjoys not knowing the type of call she is about to receive.

"I like the suspense," Cox said. "I like helping people. We are the true first responders. A lot of people overlook us because we're behind the scenes."

Cox says they have to be ready for any call. One moment it could be a cat in the tree followed by a call of someone not breathing.

"You have to be ready to go from one extreme to the other," Cox said. "I like that we are helping people with every call. A woman calling about their cat stuck in a tree is significant for them."

Dispatchers understand that, just like they understand why people call about snakes in their yard.

"We get those calls all the time," Cox said.

No matter what the call or what happens, the 911 center is where every case begins and where it ends.

"We are the first and the last of the whole process," Palmer said. "We get the initial call and when it is over we get to close it out."

A wreck call from the interstate



Photo by Payton Towns III

**Laurens County 911 director Russ Palmer is seen seated in front of an array of monitors found at one of the center's dispatch stations where emergency calls are received and processed.**

will generate a lot of phone calls.

"We may get 10 to 15 calls on one wreck, back-to-back-to-back," Palmer said. "Once the call comes in, we have different dispatchers handle different areas."

Dispatchers ask a lot of questions when they receive a call.

"A lot of people get annoyed with us," Cox said. "As soon as we get what they need, and their location, help is on the way. The other answers we get from our questions are being relayed to law enforcement, firefighters or EMS so that they can be prepared when they arrive on the scene."

It is all about getting the information.

"We want the responders to know what they are rolling up to," Palmer said. "We understand if it's a bad wreck that some people don't want to stop and see something that is bad. But it's hard to find out if there are injuries or somebody trapped inside unless they stop. When we do get a person to stop we try to keep that person on the phone and get as much details as we can from them, while sending responders to the scene."

Palmer recalls how a dispatcher's questions solved a missing person's case.

"Before we got the deputy to the house we had already found the missing person," he said.

The Laurens County 911 Center has four people working two, 12-hour shifts a day. In all, they have four shifts.

"We have a day and night shift and all work a rotation that is like

the sheriff's office and police department," said Palmer, adding that they are currently taking applications for full-time employees.

In 2017, the busiest day of the week for the 911 center was Tuesday with Wednesday right behind it. The time from 2 p.m. to 3 p.m. is the highest call volume for the center.

"I have no idea why this is the way it is around here," Palmer said.

Last year, dispatchers spent 54 minutes actively taking a call, processing a call or dispatching a call.

When an law enforcement officer pulls someone over, or gets out to check on someone, they will call the 911 center to see if the person is wanted or has proper insurance.

"We want to make sure the officer is good," Palmer said. "We typically check with them for three minutes and try to stay in constant contact with them."

Technology has helped with callers who do not know where they are, especially those traveling east or west through Laurens County on I-16.

"Most of those tell us they are heading either north or south on I-16," Palmer said. "We try to help them by asking them if they are heading toward Macon or Savannah and that will give us a direction. If we keep them on the phone they'll pass another mile marker or we can triangulate where they are. As long as we can keep them on the phone, we can

figure out about the basic area where they are located."

Palmer said dispatchers do not deal with a lot of stress.

"Everything we deal with is mental or psychological," he said. "It could be from the 12 hours shifts from being in that room or the part of the job where you sit inside that room for that length of time. It may be the sad news of taking a call from a loved one who has just passed."

They do get the chance to help make a positive memory.

"We've had to talk someone through childbirth before the ambulance gets there," Palmer said. "That's a fun one but it's still a very stressful things to do. You want to try to do the best that you can but you have to do it quickly. You don't want to make mistakes. But it is a juggling act of hurrying up and getting it done."

His favorite part is when he can help public safety from inside a locked-door environment.

"I enjoy being able to help people and this is my way of doing that," Palmer said. "We coordinate a lot. If we have a big wreck on the interstate, we're calling for mutual aid and helicopters. Once they get there and get stuff figured out, we are calling wreckers for everybody and other state agencies to help shut down the roads. We are checking on them and making phone calls when they want us to make phone calls. There is a lot of behind the scenes work that nobody thinks about us doing."

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# GSP Post Commander MacKay Bloodworth: Honoring the golden rule in law enforcement

By **BRETT DANIEL**

MacKay Bloodworth was working with the Georgia State Patrol in Madison, Georgia when he was told that a woman had lost her son in a dump truck collision.

Bloodworth, a trooper at the time, wrote the son's death notice and drove to the woman's house to break the news, only to find that she was not home. So, he waited.

"I saw her pull in and she got out of her car and went inside just like every other day, not knowing what news was fixing to greet her," Bloodworth says. "I gave her a minute, walked inside, took my hat off and gave her the news. Complete devastation. It's the worst news that any parent could ever possibly be given."

Bloodworth described compassion and empathy in moments like these as easily overlooked, since state patrol officers handle similar situations so often.

Bloodworth, however, grasps the importance of simply being there for someone during their time of need.

"We have to remind ourselves that we are humans, too, instead of being callous to other people's emotions," Bloodworth says. "A couple weeks later, I got a thank you card from that mother, thanking me for the manner in which I gave her the news and for staying with her until her family could get there."

Bloodworth, a Milledgeville native, completed trooper school in 2001 and served at Post 8 in Madison until 2008, when he was promoted to corporal in Wilkes County.

He later served as the post commander in Forsyth, Georgia before assuming the same position at Post 20 in Dublin in December of 2017.

"The Dublin patrol post is very much like a family," Bloodworth says. "We basically operate like brothers and sisters. When we work, we work



Photo by Payton Towns III

**Bloodworth, a state trooper since 2001, was named the GSP's new Dublin post commander last year.**

together, when we eat, we have a meal together. It's just a very friendly environment."

Bloodworth's job as commander is to ensure the efficient operation of his post, from scheduling to verifying officer training requirements as well as networking with local department heads and agencies, among other duties.

It's a dream job, Bloodworth says, and a position he never thought he'd accept.

"When I first had the idea of being a trooper, that's all I wanted to do," he says. "I never even looked past that. Now, almost 20 years later, I'm a post commander. If I stay where I am now as post commander in Dublin for the remainder of my career, I've been much more blessed than I ever could have dreamed of."

But working as a law enforcement official with the Georgia State Patrol isn't always dreamy.

The profession is inherently dangerous, Bloodworth says, as officers are sometimes placed in high-risk situations that could cost them their lives.

"I've been in situations with a barricaded gunman, a fully armed gunman, and held positions outside the house in case he came out shooting," Bloodworth says. "Recently, in the city of Dublin, we assisted the police department in clear-

ing a house in what we believed was an armed hostage situation. Inherently, it's a dangerous job, just by the nature of what we do."

But Bloodworth is aware that this is the job he signed up for, so he makes it a point to take precautions, ensuring that he and his troopers undergo extensive training to protect themselves properly.

Away from the post, Bloodworth is an outdoorsman who enjoys fishing, camping, kayaking and hunting. His wife, Sherri, and two children, Lizzie, 14, and Walker, 13, are his heart.

It's this precious time with his family that Bloodworth says helps humanize him for the job he does every day. He wants the community to know that officers, despite their position of authority, are people, too, and that they see the public as equals.

"We are not robots," Bloodworth says. "We have lives outside of work, families, hobbies. We understand that the public is not just a number or a statistic. We want to treat the public just like we would want to be treated."

Primarily, Bloodworth continues, "We are here to educate the public and make the roads safer for everybody. And I am thankful for those who have put their trust in me and given me that responsibility."

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# Dublin Police Department Chief Tim Chatman: Channeling calm as a leader in law enforcement

By **BRETT DANIEL**

Tim Chatman, police chief of the Dublin Police Department, starts his busy day with an idle activity.

"I start my day with meditation," he says. "I'm preparing spiritually."

After channeling his inner calm, Chatman dedicates his working hours to ensuring his officers have everything they need to remain efficient and safe on the job. Equally as important to the chief is building relationships with other law enforcement officials in the community and surrounding areas.

"I consider myself the person who works with everybody," Chatman says, "the Georgia State Patrol, the Sheriff's Office, East Dublin, Treutlen County, Twiggs County, Wilkinson County. We believe in working with people, because at the end of the day, we have the same assignment. We are fighting the same fight."

One of the biggest challenges Chatman faces as chief is educating the public about the law enforcement process. Although a large part of his job is monitoring, preventing and stopping crime in its tracks, the Dublin Police Department is not an omnipresent entity.



Photo by Payton Towns III

**Dublin Chief of Police Tim Chatman answers a phone call from his desk at the Dublin Police Department, where he has served as chief since 2016.**

"We cannot be everywhere at the same time," he says. "That's kind of aggravating. It's aggravating when you don't have enough personnel to do your job, but we cannot operate on excuses. We have to get the job done."

And we are committed to getting the job done."

Another challenging aspect of Chatman's job is watching firsthand the effects crime has on citizens in the community.

Although law enforcement officials are required to do just that - enforce the law - which includes making arrests and charging people with crimes, it's sometimes difficult for Chatman to see members of the community ruin their futures.

"It's aggravating to see young folks, middle-aged folks and even older folks mess up, take a life, rob somebody, molest somebody, rape somebody or steal from somebody," Chatman says. "Nothing good is going to come out of that. You know, gang stuff, young people not thinking, destroying all of their ability and life over something silly."

In particular, Chatman, who has a law enforcement background in handling crimes against children, is sometimes troubled by the struggles kids have to endure as a result of a perpetrator's actions.

"I've been a part of different types of cases in which it just left a stain," he says, "with our kids being molest-

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ed and even killed. When it involves children, that has always been something that is hard to deal with."

But Chatman remains calm and composed, saying his job as police chief has blessed him with the humility and patience required to manage his day-to-day duties. Work technically starts at 8 a.m. and ends at 5 p.m., but Chatman is always involved with the work of his officers, even remotely.

"There are times that you get home and you come back to work, or you may go in late, or if something bad happens, we just have to run with it," he says. "We have to keep rolling. That's the normal personality of this job. It's not just an 8 to 5. Even when you get home, you're dealing with something by way of telephone, or you just may have to come back to the office to assist."

At first, Chatman didn't want to accept the job as police chief. But in his unwavering devotion to his own personal spirituality, he says God told him it was the right thing to do.

"I didn't want the headache of dealing with this job, especially in this day and time when the police are looked down upon and nobody respects these men and women who are putting their life on the line for the citizens," Chatman says. "But this is the job He told me to do, and I'm doing it. I count it as a blessing to be in this position and to do the work that He sent me to do."

Indeed, Chatman values his position as chief of the Dublin Police Department. He says he is blessed to have such formidable community support and to represent the men and women of his department.

His one message to the community: "Be our eyes and ears."

"Partner with us and build more understanding," he says. "Cover us in prayer. This is a dangerous job. Let's work together to make Dublin and Laurens County better."



Photo by Payton Towns III

**Chatman and wife Verlinda following his swearing-in ceremony in the summer of 2016.**

## Sheriff Larry Dean: Tackling mental health and drugs in Laurens County

By **BRETT DANIEL**

The greatest problems facing law enforcement in Laurens County and the state of Georgia today are mental health issues and frequent drug use, says Laurens County Sheriff Larry Dean.

Roughly 75 percent of the inmates housed at the county sheriff's office take medication for some type of mental health disorder, Dean says, and even worse, rehabilitation isn't always readily available to them.

"We have no facilities to treat these people in," Dean says. "Until we get some help from our state and federal people to get us some mental health facilities to help these people, they're just going to keep going into the system. What we've got to figure out is a way to reach these people."

Dean believes that many of the mental health disorders afflicting inmates are self-induced by regular drug use. Methamphetamine use, in particular, is an ongoing problem for Dean and his deputies.

"A lot of these people just have an addiction problem," Dean says. "They haven't been caught selling or distributing dope. They're just users. Probably 50 to 60 percent of our mental health cases are due to different types of drugs and alcohol. If they could get the proper rehab, we could put them back out there as productive citizens."

One of the many reasons behind the county's addiction problem, Dean says, is the disconnect between local youth and their guardians.

The vicious cycle of parents and grandparents acting as drug enablers for their children and grandchildren, which Dean says robs the older generation of their money and security and the younger generation of their freedom and reputation, is what troubles him the most.



File Photo

**Dean visits with students, parents and staff at East Laurens Elementary School during an event last year.**

"We have a young generation of kids that have gotten on drugs," Dean says. "When they get out in the real world, they get hooked, particularly on meth and prescription pills. They'll abuse the older generation, destroying their financial security to where they [can't] look after themselves when they get older. That's the part that's broken my heart the most as sheriff."

Dean says parents visit his office every week asking the department to help their children, but unless the child is actually seen breaking the law, there's nothing the sheriff's office can do.

"We just don't have the facilities," Dean says. "We actually can't bring a person into our jail until they commit a crime."

Some of Dean's solutions to the county's mental health and drug addiction

problems, which he believes are interrelated, are working with Fairview Park Hospital for mental health resources, driving community involvement in the matter and building relationships with citizens through his deputies, who are out in the field every day.

"Community involvement is the best way to have good law enforcement and to have a safe community," Dean says. "My goal is to get every deputy and every employee that I got to build a relationship with the people in the community. Build that relationship to where you can get the information. Good information from the community is the key to successful law enforcement."

The Laurens County Sheriff's Office is located at 511 Southern Pines Road in Dublin and can be reached at 478-272-1522.

## Bill Luecke: The public's police chief

By **BRETT DANIEL**

A little boy was crossing the street to buy a watermelon from a food truck when a car hit him.

East Dublin Police Chief Bill Luecke arrived on the scene not long after and gave the boy CPR, but it was too late.

The boy's mother witnessed everything.

"To be in a ditch doing CPR on a 7-year-old that's been hit by a car, looking at the mother there beside him, crying and screaming, and you trying to calm her down and tell her it's going to be all right,

when you know in your heart that it's not," Luecke says, sighing. "He was gone while I was doing it, but I was trying to give Mom a sign of hope."

Luecke said the boy's death taught him that no one is promised tomorrow.

And as a police chief, husband and father, Luecke now recognizes the reality and significance of such a sentiment.

"Life is short," he says. "I know you've heard the old cliché. Hug your kids and love your family every day."

And that's exactly what Luecke does when he gets home after a busy day of man-



File Photo

**Luecke has served as Chief of the East Dublin Police Department for 21 years.**

aging the East Dublin Police Department.

Aside from his typical scheduling, case assignment and code enforcement responsibilities, Luecke also tracks which types of crime are affecting the city of East Dublin the most.

“We deal with a lot of domestic violence and we work a lot of traffic,” he says. “Our case load with juveniles has risen. And we have our drug issues just like any other town.”

To combat these issues, Luecke employs a law enforcement philosophy involving education and solution-based approaches, as opposed to police violence and authoritarianism.

While he recognizes that sometimes arrests must be made, he prefers to solve problems fairly and peacefully if at all possible.

“This job is not about locking up people, this job is about helping people,” he says. “Not everybody needs a ticket. Not everybody needs to go to jail. What we try to do is solve problems. We don’t get pleasure out of putting people in jail, but sometimes that’s how it has to be. We would much rather go to a residence and resolve an issue without taking somebody to jail.”

Part of Luecke’s problem-solving outlook comes from the fact that he truly loves his community and

wants to see it flourish.

“I love my community,” he says. “I don’t know how to put it into words.”

As police chief, Luecke has plenty to be thankful for, from the men and women he employs to the community he serves.

But people often perceive him as the typical hardline police officer, and that’s a perception he wants to dispel.

“When people see me, [they see that] I’m not the booger they think I am,” he says, laughing.

And after dealing with the public as a law enforcement official for more than 35 years, Luecke, despite witnessing major crimes, still holds out hope for the good of humanity.

“All you ever hear is negative, negative, negative, but there’s still some good people in this world,” he says. “It has given me a sense of hope. The world is bad, but it could be worse, and there’s always room for improvement.”

Undoubtedly, Luecke works to better his community, and as for “police chief,” Luecke says that’s nothing more than a title.

“I don’t care about being referred to as chief, I am Bill, and that’s the way I like it.”

The East Dublin Police Department is located at 116 Savannah Avenue and can be reached at 478-272-6883.



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# Don Bryant: The father of emergency services in Laurens County



File photo

**Laurens County EMA Director Don Bryant addresses emergency response coordinators during the debrief of a 2012 series of crashes on I-16.**

**By BRETT DANIEL**

That day, Laurens County Fire Chief Don Bryant had been talking on the phone with his wife, who was traveling to Eastman, Georgia with their daughter and their 9-year-old son.

Not long after he said goodbye, the fire department received a call about a wreck involving a passenger vehicle and a log truck near Dublin Eastman Road and Georgia Highway 126.

"When I got to the scene, the passenger vehicle was overturned and there was a boy about 9-years-old that was trapped underneath the vehicle," Bryant says. "I knew then it was not my family, but it was close enough that all the way out there, that's what I thought. I remember that we worked very diligently to get that boy free from that wreckage. He was alive the whole time, but he died later during his trip to the hospital. And that probably affected me as much as anything that's ever happened in my career with the fire department."

Fire Chief Donald Bryant has served Laurens County since January of 1980, when he was just a 28-year-old volunteer firefighter in Dexter, Georgia.

Bryant, now 67, eventually

became the first full-time paid firefighter with the county as a coordinator of all the local volunteer fire stations.

Rising through the ranks, Bryant officially became county fire chief in 1990 and has overseen the Laurens County Fire Department ever since.

"I remember thinking that I liked the fire service, but that it doesn't pay enough money to become a firefighter," Bryant says laughing from the kitchen of Fire Station 10 in Dublin. "But, I ended up moving in that direction. And it has been rewarding to me."

Daily, Bryant's duties include listening to calls placed within the last 24 hours to determine whether follow-up is necessary, ensuring stations in the county are staffed and that volunteers are available for response, and supervising the training of both volunteer and paid firefighters.

As a busy chief, Bryant himself doesn't respond to every emergency phone call. Some of Bryant's other duties include fire prevention planning and regular meetings with Fire Chief Matthew Cutler, of Dublin, and Fire Chief Mark Tarpley, of East Dublin, as well as conducting fire

investigations when necessary.

"It's a pretty good length of responsibilities that fall under the fire chief section," Bryant says. "As a fire chief, you're on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It doesn't mean I respond to every call, but my ear is always listening to the radio and to the phone for something that might come up."

Bryant recalled an occasion from early in his career when he responded to a large house fire in the area. Each part of the house had burned down except for the kitchen, where one of the only belongings that remained was a set of hand-me-down china.

The family, Bryant said, despite just losing their home, were thrilled to hear that the ceramic dishes had survived.

"Even though they lost their whole house, they were just overjoyed that they were able to save that part of it that had sentimental value to them," Bryant says. "That has stuck with me over the years. All of us have things that are very special to us in life. Memories, pictures, things of that nature. In a house fire, those are things that you lose. Even though you may have to start all over with the structure, if you can just

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save some of those things that are special to you, I think that's important. It's just a rewarding feeling to be able to help some folks salvage some of those things."

Bryant also serves as emergency management agency director for the county, a position he's held since 1995. As director, Bryant facilitates responses to natural disasters such as tornadoes, hurricanes and hazardous material spills, sometimes working with state and local governments in the process.

Toxic material spills, Bryant says, is something the agency encounters often.

"One was several years ago," Bryant says. "We had some kids that threw a rock off the bridge and it went through the windshield of an 18-wheeler, and, of course, it crashed and it spilled a material. The driver had to be transported to the emergency room. And because of the chemical, they actually had to evacuate the emergency room. During the clean-up, some of the workers that were sent in to clean up that spill actually got sick and had to go to the hospital."

Outside of his numerous duties as fire chief and EMA director, Bryant is an outdoors-



File photo

**Bryant, seen (at left) at the scene of damage from a tornado in April of 2015, has served as Laurens County's Emergency Management Agency director since 1995 and as chief of the Laurens County Fire Department since 1990. The county's first full-time firefighter, Bryant has worked with the department since the age of 26.**

man, having a knack for sports and gardening. He maintains a residence in Dexter with his wife and attends Dexter Baptist Church.

At age 67, Bryant does have plans for retirement, but nothing is certain yet. He says,

however, that he looks forward to spending time with his wife and family at home.

The primary reason Bryant began his journey as a local hero is due to his love of helping others. The single-greatest thing working as fire chief and

EMA director has given him, he says, is a respect for other people and their well-being.

"One of the biggest things I've always had a desire to do is help folks," Bryant says. "I try to stay informed of what's going on in our county, not only

from a fire standpoint, but also from a standpoint of events that are happening. I feel like being informed gives us a little heads up that, if something does happen, we might be able to respond a little bit quicker."



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# Air Evac Lifeteam: An emergency room in the sky

By CLAY REYNOLDS

Not all heroes wear capes, but some of them do fly.

Members of Dublin's Air Evac Lifeteam, who take to the skies aboard a red, white and blue helicopter, may wear flight suits instead of superhero regalia. But their work to bring critical medical care to those in life-threatening emergencies across Laurens and surrounding counties does just as much to save lives.

For victims suffering serious injury in traffic crashes, shootings, fires or accidents, the treatment and transport provided by Air Evac Lifeteam flight crews, who often fly directly to the scene of emergencies to ferry patients to hospitals, can make a life-and-death difference.

A number of years back, Air Evac Lifeteam Georgia Senior Program Director John Mabry heard a knock on the door of the company's Dublin base, and saw on the other side of the glass a face he vividly remembered, but had never expected to see again. This young woman he had helped transport from the scene of an auto-



Photo by Clay Reynolds

**Members of an Air Evac Lifeteam Dublin flight crew, (from left) mechanic Paul Bartell, flight nurse Tabitha Jones, pilot Nathan Peters, pilot Tony Davidson and flight medic Jason Troupe, stand in front of their helicopter with Air Evac Lifeteam Senior Program Director John Mabry (far right).**

mobile accident during his days working as a member of an Air Evac flight crew right here in

Dublin.

"I remember particularly that day," Mabry said. "I had

her on the stretcher rolling her toward the helicopter to load her up and carry her to Macon,

and somebody said, 'Hey, let her mom see her because this is probably her last time that they see her alive.' And she was in very, very bad shape. And they got her loaded up and started working on her and got her to Navicent. She's alive today, she has a wonderful quality of life, she's 100 percent self-sufficient and had she not gotten that critical care that day, it's very very possible that she would not be alive."

Such are the lifesaving endeavors the air medical transport provider undertakes on an almost daily basis. The company serves the midstate from its base in Dublin, where flight crews are stationed around the clock, ready to respond to emergencies in which a patient needs transport by air.

Whether responding directly to the scene of an incident or flying from one hospital to another, the chopper and its on-board equipment and medical personnel make it possible to begin administering vital treatment to a patient both on-site and while en route.

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gency room trauma center to you," Mabry said. "Also, we do do hospital-to-hospital transfers. They're using that equipment and their expertise in critical care training to provide a higher level of critical care transport to another hospital, so in another sense, you've got a mobile ICU."

The company dispatches flight crews from 11 different bases across the state and has flown out of its Dublin installation on County Farm Road for upwards of eight years. The station is one of 130 such locations that carry the Air Evac Lifeteam name across 15 states in the southeast.

Each plays a similar role of service to residents in its immediate community and those within a roughly 60-mile radius, speeding up transport times for patients from the site of an emergency to the hospital when literally every second counts.

Medical professionals refer to the "golden hour" as the 60-minute time window in which emergency responders aim to get someone who suffers a severe, life-threatening injury to a hospital trauma center for treatment.

"Your likelihood of survival drops if you're not to a trauma center within that hour," said flight nurse Tabitha Jones, who is in her first year flying with Air Evac Lifeteam. "Even if we provided the same care as the EMS crews here could provide, and got that patient to the trauma center 20 minutes earlier, their likelihood of surviving improves."

Once uncommon outside of large,



File Photo

**Multiple Air Evac Lifeteam helicopters respond an emergency on a lane of I-16 in Laurens County.**

urban areas, air medical transport services have multiplied across Georgia in the past decade after officials began looking into ways of addressing the state's lopsided fatality statistics from automobile crashes and other trauma incidents.

With just five level 1 trauma centers in Georgia – two of them in Atlanta and the other three in Augusta, Macon and Savannah – getting trauma victims by ambulance to necessary treatment is largely impossible for residents in many

parts of the state.

"If you were in rural Georgia, you were three times as likely to die from a trauma incident," Mabry said. "Georgia had a very high fatality rate as far as trauma. And so the group of people, the Georgia Trauma Commission, came together as well as the governor and they started looking at, 'How can we bridge this gap and bring trauma centers to these rural areas or bring this critical care aspect to these people in rural areas?'"

As a solution, they turned to the private sector, and companies like Air Evac Lifeteam whose helicopters stationed at bases all across the state cut out a good bit of the lag time in transport, while also bringing much of the treatment a patient would receive upon arrival in an emergency room directly to the scene.

"A lot of people think of a helicopter as speed, but you're also getting critical care – the same critical care you're going to get in a hospital in that helicopter while you're being transferred," Mabry said.

The company, much like an ambulance operator, bills patients for the cost of a flight and services, but as a means of support for its operations offers a membership program, at a rate of \$85 per year, under which the costs of a flight in an emergency are covered for members and their households. But Air Evac Lifeteam provides its services to anyone in a life-threatening emergency when summoned by local 911 dispatchers.

The inclusion of the word "team" in the company name is apropos, considering the specific and instrumental role each member of a given flight crew plays.

The three-piece group aboard the aircraft consists of a pilot, a flight medic and a flight nurse. Air Evac Lifeteam's Dublin base employs four full-time specialists in each role, requiring extensive experience of each in their given field prior to joining the company and completing its helicopter-specific training in

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critical care.

Assisting on the ground, in addition to an office-based membership representative, is full-time mechanic Paul Bartell, who keeps the helicopter running and makes needed repairs day and night.

"Even though we're the flight crew, and we've also got how many other members that are flight crew members too... It takes all of us," said pilot Tony Davidson, who has served with Air Evac Lifeteam for 11 years and flown helicopters for almost 20. "I don't believe there's anyone that's any more important than anybody else. It takes all of us as a team to be able to do this, and it also takes all of our members and all of the people in the community who support us to be able to do what we do in this rural environment that we do it in."

That support and teamwork also includes the first responders, fire, EMS and law enforcement personnel with whom they work hand-in-hand at the scene of an incident. Those on the ground also undergo regular training in how to scout out landing locations in advance and guide pilots into an incident scene upon arrival.

Air Evac Lifeteam officials

and crew members are convinced that what they do wouldn't be possible without the great relationship between the company and the various arms of local emergency service, most of which neighbor its Dublin base.

"We are dependent on our EMS agencies and fire to activate us," Jones said. "We try to have good community relations with the different agencies. It's mutual respect. Because we know that they can do a lot of the same things we can do, it's just that we can get them further faster."

"There's a reason why we're here, right across the street," Mabry added.

Administering medical treatment is hard. Doing it at several hundred feet of altitude, not to mention inside the tiny cabin of a helicopter, is even harder. With three crew members, a patient, supplies and equipment all on board the chopper, space is at a definite premium.

"We're pretty much shoulder to shoulder," Davidson said. "If you've got a personal space issue, that's not the place for you to be."

The pilot flies solo at the controls in the front right of the cockpit, with the flight medic

and nurse seated side-by-side at the rear of the aircraft. The patient is strapped onto a stretcher that runs down the left side with a myriad equipment taking up what little space remains on the right.

Both the nurse and medic must remain seated while the helicopter is airborne, limiting their reach and ability to do certain things, specifically perform CPR.

"It can be challenging," said flight nurse Tabitha Jones. "You can't stand up at any point."

But every inch of that tight space is put to good use. On board are a number of critical care necessities that most emergency medical responders don't have available until getting a patient to the emergency room.

"You can basically do about anything with a limited space as you can do in an emergency room," Davidson said.

Air Evac helicopters carry among their specialized equipment a hospital-grade portable ventilator, as well as specialized medications generally not found in ambulances and a readily-available blood supply if needed for transfusions.

"Typically, when you were in a trauma incident and you

needed blood, you would have to go to the hospital, get them to go get the blood from the blood bank and all that kind of stuff," Mabry said. "And that takes time. Whenever they land, they've got the blood in their hands. That's time, where it's going to take 20 minutes to get it from a blood bank. We can already have it started within just a couple minutes of landing."

The company also holds top certification from the Commission on Accreditation of Medical Transport Systems (CAMTS).

While the work each Air Evac Lifeteam employee does in their respective position is as much a job as it is a public service, there is a sense of compassion for the communities and patients they serve involved in this line of work they've chosen.

"We do a lot of flying and we transport a lot of patients," Davidson said, "but there are times when you know for a fact that when you actually pick up that patient and you drop them off at the hospital and everybody gets back into that helicopter and you know for a fact that you're a definite impact in that person's life, I mean, there is no doubt in your mind that if it weren't for you being where

you were at that given time, that the outcome could potentially have been bad."

And every now and then, as Mabry experienced that afternoon at the base, a specific patient from the past will call or come by to offer their thanks. Those expressions of gratitude create a feeling he described as "overwhelming."

"When somebody comes back to you and looks at you in the face and says, 'Thank you for saving my life,' man... I can't explain it to you, but if you've ever had chills over your whole body at one time, even the hair on your ears if you have it stood up, that's really how chilling it is, meeting somebody face-to-face like that," he said.

Those moments are worth more than any paycheck.

"The best part of this job is when you're actually standing in line at Walmart and somebody walks up behind me and goes, 'You know what, you flew so and so a certain time ago, and I don't know if it was you, but thank you so much for what you do,'" Davidson said. "You can't get anything better than that. You can't pay for that, you know. That's compensation that you would never get anywhere else."

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# Fire Chiefs of Laurens County: Teamwork, Talent, Tact

By **BRETT DANIEL**

Laurens County Fire Chief Don Bryant, City of Dublin Fire Chief Matthew Cutler and East Dublin Fire Chief Mark Tarpley share a special relationship with each other.

Although each chief is in charge of his respective jurisdiction in the county, in case of a fire or other emergency, they want the community to know that they always have each other's back, especially when lives are on the line.

"We work very closely together," Bryant says. "If we have a need, even though it might be a good way from their jurisdiction, they're going to help us."

Through monthly meetings, the chiefs work together by reviewing previous fires and emergencies and determining in what areas they can improve.

In addition, via automatic and mutual aid contracts, the Laurens County, Dublin and East Dublin fire departments have agreed to assist each other during emergencies in certain areas of the city and county.

For instance, Cutler, Bryant says, may respond with his City of Dublin personnel into certain parts of the county, while Bryant may respond with his Laurens County personnel into certain parts of the city. The same relationship applies with Tarpley and the East Dublin Fire Department.

"The biggest thing is that we all have the same goal in mind: If somebody is hurt, somebody is having an emergency, somebody is losing their property, we want to be able to get there and help them out," Bryant says. "I never want to see it get to the point that there's a line here, and because a jurisdiction changes, we can't cross that line. If we need to help, we want to help."

These reciprocating agreements benefit each department, Bryant says, by improving emergency response times and providing additional resources that a single department may be lacking during a large-scale event.



Photo by ???

**Dublin Fire Chief Matthew Cutler (left), Laurens County Fire Chief Don Bryant (center) and East Dublin Fire Chief Mark Tarpley work closely with one another despite serving different areas of the community.**

Cutler recalled a recent fire near Buckeye Road in East Dublin where all three chiefs responded to the scene.

"The fire was in the community that I live in, so I responded in as a volunteer," Cutler said. "[Tarpley] responded out with a fire truck. Then, Chief Bryant ended up on the same call because it was questionable about how the fire started, and we were not sure if the occupant was still in there. If there's a fire fatality, he's definitely got to be involved."

Cutler also discussed a fire that occurred in downtown Dublin around 2007. Bryant's personnel assisted, and the East Dublin Fire Department sent a fire truck to assist as well.

Cutler says he's formed a special bond with each of the fire chiefs as a result of working alongside them for many years.

"I kind of look at Chief Bryant as a father figure," Cutler says. "[Tarpley] and I, both being from the East Side, we run up on calls together all the time. It has formed a bond, and a friendship and family of sorts. All three of our hearts are in serving our community to the best of our ability."

Tarpley echoed Cutler's sentiments.

"We're really good friends," he says. "We have been for years. I think Don started full-time four years before I did, and we hit it off real good. I've been knowing Matthew since before he got into the volunteer service, before he ever went full-time with Dublin. We've always been real close."

Outside of the heavy workload, the fire chiefs make it a point to enjoy their spare time. Bryant enjoys sports and gardening; Cutler enjoys going to the beach and mountains with his wife and

children, as well as watching Nascar; and Tarpley works on golf carts and small engines.

Ultimately, saving lives, building relationships, improving their respective fire departments and contributing to the community are the common goals the fire chiefs share. Whether through being available during a person's a time of need or through community education initiatives and fundraising for fire victims, Chiefs Bryant, Cutler and Tarpley want the community to know that they're on standby.



File Photo

**Firefighters work to extinguish remnants of a blaze originating with a controlled burn that consumed a barn in southern Laurens County in May of 2013.**

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# Laurens County game warden Daniel Stiles: 'To serve and protect'... natural resources

By **RODNEY MANLEY**

There's more to a game warden's job than just making sure that hunters bag the legal limit of birds or boaters have enough lifejackets on board.

"We're here to protect the resources for the present and future generations," said Cpl. Daniel Stiles of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, who works Laurens County. "Enforcing the hunting and the boating laws is a lot about public safety."

"The thing that makes our job difficult is they're recreating. Some people may take it as we're out to ruin a good time. They feel like they may not be doing something illegal."

Stiles has worked with the DNR for 24 years. In 2011, he was assigned Laurens County, the third-largest county in the state, which gives him lots of ground to cover.

"I believe Laurens County is something like 800 square miles, with a river, two large

wildlife management areas and the Hugh Gillis Public Fishing Area," he said. "There's always something to do."

A game warden's most routine duty carries inherent danger as the officers can easily be mistaken for game by inexperienced or careless hunters.

"Game wardens have been shot. I can think of three officers in the last 10 years who have been shot by hunters," Stiles said.

"We work alone most of the time. There's always a risk. The vast majority of time we're dealing with very nice people, and if they've committed a violation out of ignorance or they didn't think it was a big deal."

Sometimes, however, the rangers cross paths with criminals. One of a game warden's responsibilities is enforcing laws prohibiting illegal digging for artifacts.

"It's a problem in a lot of counties, and the people doing



Stiles has worked with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources' Law Enforcement Division for 24 years, and since 2011 has served as game warden in Laurens County, where his jurisdiction covers more than 800 square miles. (Photo by Rodney Manley)

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it a lot of the times are methamphetamine users. These people have to be doing something, and they'll spend all night digging in a creek bed, trying to find arrowheads."

And there are hunters who might be under the influence or in possession of illicit drugs, or convicted felons with firearms.

"Hunting under the influence is dangerous for everyone," said Stiles. "Sometimes it's not just chasing a kid who might have too many ducks through the woods. They might be willing to hurt me to get away."

An all-too-common violation is night hunting.

"It's extremely dangerous when someone is riding on a dirt road and shooting from a moving vehicle at night. We've had livestock shot. We've had bullets in houses in Laurens County," Stiles said. "With these thermal scopes they have these days, it's extremely dangerous."

A game warden's responsibility of protecting the area's natural resources extends to enforcing laws on littering and illegal dumping, which Stiles noted is an issue in Laurens County.

"I'll go through there and



Photo by Rodney Manley

**Stiles, who presides over the county's public fishing area (above) and wildlife management areas in addition to waters of the Oconee River, enforces hunting and boating laws across the entire county.**

see who is responsible. I'm working a case right now where someone dumped four or five bags of trash near Montrose. I have all the evidence I need. That cat just hasn't been at any of the addresses. I'll find him."

The Georgia Department of Natural Resources is one of the state's most powerful agencies when it comes to enforcing the law.

"We're a state law enforcement agency, but we have a

federal commission, too. We can put people in federal court if we need to," Stiles explained. "The notion that we have more power than any other agency comes from the fact that we can go on any property – not buildings – without a warrant. We don't abuse that power, but it's there."

Stiles, who worked with Laurens County Sheriff Larry Dean during Dean's days as a game warden, said he relies on cooperation with other area

law enforcement agencies. He noted that suspected gang activity was identified recently at one of the county's wildlife management areas, and the Dublin Police Department was able to make a case.

"We work with the other law enforcement agencies. I have a good working relationship with the Dublin Police Department, East Dublin Police Department and especially the Laurens County Sheriff's Office – they're great – and the Georgia State Patrol."

Stiles lives in neighboring Dodge County. His office is his 2016 Ford F-150 extended cab pickup truck. Depending on the time of the year, he might patrol 150 to 250 miles per day in his truck or spend six hours in a boat on the Oconee River.

"We don't have any typical days. It depends on the season. This time of the year we're concentrating on enforcing the fishing and boating laws. There's also hunting for feral hogs and property owners with deer control permits. We monitor them.

"Some officers who work at Lake Lanier might issue 500 to 600 citations a year. An average for me might be 150 citations or arrests. We don't have a set schedule. We have

assigned days, but when we're on duty it's 24-hours-a-day, seven-days-a-week. We work all the holidays, except Christmas, but if something happens, we get called in. And that's happened."

A native of Missouri, Stiles attended Southwest Missouri State – now Missouri State – where he earned a degree in wildlife conservation and management. He and his wife moved to Georgia in 1993.

They have three children – two daughters and a son. His son and oldest daughter are hunters. His youngest daughter "absolutely adores fishing."

"She loves trout fishing. She and I go up to North Georgia and trout fish several times a year."

Stiles encourages outdoorsmen and women to take advantage of all that Laurens County has to offer.

"I appreciate all our hunters and fishermen and boaters," he said. "I encourage people to get out and enjoy the outdoors. I work in a section that includes six other counties. We have the Ocmulgee and Oconee rivers and a tremendous amount of public hunting land. People need to get out and enjoy it."

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Dustin P. Gay, MD, graduated from Georgia College and State University in Milledgeville, GA, with a Bachelor of Science degree in Biology and a Minor in Chemistry. He went on to earn his medical degree at the Medical College of Georgia in Augusta. Dr. Gay completed his orthopaedic residency at Utman Memorial Hospital in Baltimore, MD. Additionally, he finished a one-year clinical fellowship in adult reconstruction at Anderson Orthopaedic Clinic in Alexandria, VA.

A board certified orthopaedic surgeon, Dr. Gay has published several medical research articles and he has presented in his subspecialty area of orthopaedic adult reconstruction, hip resurfacing and hip replacement. He has also served with the Food and Drug Administration's Office of Device Evaluation as an orthopaedic medical device reviewer. His clinical interest includes general orthopaedics, hand surgery, hip fractures, and total joint replacement including revision surgery of the hip and knee.

**Jeremy H. Richter, MD**

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Jeremy H. Richter, MD, graduated from University of Georgia in Athens, GA, with a Bachelor of Science degree in Biology. He went on to earn his medical degree at Mercer University School of Medicine in Macon, GA. Dr. Richter completed his orthopaedic residency at University of Arkansas in Little Rock, AR.

A board certified orthopaedic surgeon, Dr. Richter is a fellow of the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons. He is the team physician for West Laurens High School, East Laurens High School, Trinity Christian School, Dublin High School, and Johnson County High School. His clinical interests include general orthopaedics, sports medicine, hand surgery, and fracture repair. When not at work, his outside interests include spending time with family or playing at the lake or farm.

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# Laurens County EMS: 'One of God's tools in his toolbox'

By KELLY LENZ

Laurens County Emergency Medical Services Director Terry Cobb started his career in EMS in 1991. Cobb said he was drawn to this particular line of work out of a desire to help others.

"I was actually a high school senior going to EMT school at night," he said. "I've worked here for Laurens County since 1995."

Originally from Dodge County, Cobb has lived and worked in Laurens County for over 20 years. His first job was as a road paramedic.

"Probably in the late 90s, I was promoted to shift captain and then in 2002, I was promoted to the director," Cobb said.

Since he's worked the various positions over the years, he's familiar with what his staff of about 65 people goes through each day at the EMS center.

"I've spent a lot of nights running ambulance calls. We average between 30-40 calls per day. The calls are about a variety of issues," Cobb said.

When they receive a request from the 911 center for ambulance service, Cobb says they have to be prepared to deal with any imaginable scenario, as they don't know what the situation may involve.

"One call may be about a heart attack. The next may be a wreck and the next call may be someone who's not in a critical life-threatening situation but may not know who else to turn to, and they call 911 for help. Sometimes, we're just trying to help get people in the right direction."

As far as saving someone's life, Cobb said, "It's a huge feeling. I can't compare it to anything else I've ever experienced. It's a very humbling and overwhelming feeling."

Behind the scenes, he added, "There is a good bit of paperwork for each call that we run. We spend a good bit of time making sure that we're prepared for the call."

He said this includes everything from washing the ambulances to restocking trucks and conducting training.

Despite the stress involved with his work, Cobb said he loves what he does.

"I think you kind of need to have the idea that you're willing to be around some of the aspects of it. There's



Photos by Kelly Lenz

**Laurens County Emergency Medical Service responders are seen at the agency's headquarters (left) Wendell Brantley, Mitch Cobb, Rebecca Swain, Mason Upshaw, David Darsey, Tim Jones, Sam Finch, Jared Brown, Jon Spires, Dwayne Ussery, Stacy Kitchens, Terry Cobb, Dusty Thomas, Justin Mickler and Forrest Jones; (right) Wendell Brantley, Mitch Cobb, Rebecca Swain, Justin Mickler, David Darsey, Tim Jones, Sam Finch, Jared Brown, Jon Spires, Dwayne Ussery, Stacy Kitchens, Terry Cobb, Dusty Thomas, Mason Upshaw and Forrest Jones.**

blood and other things that are unpleasant. I don't really know that there's a test out there that you can go and test yourself for those kinds of things, but it's not all that."

Although his staff members come from different backgrounds, one thing Cobb said they all have in common is that, "It takes a person who's caring and compassionate to other people, and that has a general sense of the value of life and preservation of life. It also takes a critical thinker because it's stressful. There are critical decisions that have to be made in the heat of the moment. It's a balance between a Type A personality and a compassionate person."

"The thing that has interested me the most and been the most fulfilling to me," Cobb added, "is the sense of being able to help people. It's been a good a career for me, but it's been very rewarding because of being able to be in that moment in time where you're able to help somebody."

"On occasion we have an opportunity where we actually get somebody back and to be able to enjoy that moment with the family and to see that."

However, he said, "That's not always the outcome. Sometimes those are sad times, but whenever we get those opportunities where we're able to be able to be one of God's tools in his toolbox, and to be able to enjoy that moment with the family, that's very rewarding."

Some of the most difficult things to deal with, he said, are "bad outcomes."

"Unfortunately, bad outcomes are a part of life," Cobb said. "Trying to support family members and the people who are involved when there are bad outcomes."

Handling these situations can take an emotional toll, Cobb said. "Internally, we kind of support each other, talk to each other and lean on each other. There are times where we cry along with the family members and even in private sometimes where no one else can see it. So, that's probably one of the more stressful things about this line of work."

"It's absolutely a team atmosphere," Cobb said. "I think that there are some times where we do bring work home with us, but I think a lot of times we kind of absorb that here in the team and everybody talks with each other. I don't think we carry a lot of it home, but it does sometimes happen."

The center has a staff of 10 people on duty each day, and has 10 licensed ambulances. Cobb said the EMS center has three shifts, and each work 24 hours at a time. "So they work one day, they're off two days and then they come back the third day."

"We operate five advanced life support ambulances 24 hours a day/7 days per week," he added. "We also provide all EMS transportation for patients at Fairview Park Hospital. We also have a

strong partnership with Fairview Park Hospital that helps with early recognition of heart attacks and strokes that lead to early activation of their STEMI (Cardiac Cath Lab), Stroke and Trauma systems."

The EMS territory is the boundaries of Laurens County, Cobb said. "So we're the primary provider for any request for an ambulance inside of Laurens County. All of our calls do come through the 911 center. We also handle all of the transfers out of Fairview Park Hospital. So if you find yourself at Fairview in need of being transferred to another facility, we handle all of their transfers."

The EMS center also has a strong collaboration with local fire departments, Cobb said. "The fire departments respond with us on most calls and provide initial treatment and assist EMS with manpower on critical calls. The fire departments have emergency medical responder training and carry specialized equipment and work directly under EMS' protocols. Some of the fire stations have staffed EMTs that also respond and provide critical lifesaving interventions."

"The fire departments, because they are more abundant and strategically placed throughout the cities and county, provide a very quick response and begin early treatment and intervention to EMS calls in Laurens County."

Cobb said one thing he wants the public to know is

that "at the first signs of a heart attack or stroke that 911/EMS should be called immediately."

"We still encounter patients that wait, thinking that it will go away or get better, and attempt to drive themselves to their physician's office or the ER," he said. "Time is of the utmost essence with a heart attack or stroke. EMS can begin necessary treatment and tests and also activate Fairview's cardiac cath lab or Stroke team even before the patient physically arrives at the hospital. Early recognition and intervention are hugely important to good patient outcomes in heart attacks and strokes."

Even with the stress of his position, Cobb said he finds his work rewarding and is thankful he's able to provide lifesaving services to the public.

"I told my daughters that if you enjoy what you do, you never work a day in your life, and I don't feel like I've worked a day yet in my life," he said. "I really enjoy it. This is a good service to work for. This is a good community to work in."

Although as director, he's not involved in the daily patient care as often, he said, "I'm facilitating the ladies and gentleman who are doing it. I'm facilitating them being able to do it. So, there's still a lot of reward and satisfaction I get out of being able to facilitate them, being able to do the good work that the public sees."

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