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LOCAL

Steuben County hiring wave of EMS employees to provide better urgent care. Here's why.



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Key Points AI-assisted summary

Steuben County, New York is hiring EMS personnel to address a shortage in volunteer emergency responders.

The county will hire full-time and part-time EMTs and paramedics to supplement volunteer services.

The new EMS employees will be stationed in Hammondsport and Woodhull, providing 24/7 coverage.

As volunteer numbers dwindle at smalltown ambulance services, Steuben County is taking matters into its own hands.

The sprawling county in New York state's Southern Tier will soon hire around two dozen emergency medical services employees who will provide urgent pre-hospital treatment and stabilization for serious illnesses and injuries, the type of on-scene care that has often been lacking in rural areas throughout the county.

Tim Marshall, Steuben County Director of Public Safety, said adding these EMS positions is going to fill a gap in emergency responses across the more rural parts of the county, where a lack of available care has been an increasing problem.

“This is something Steuben County has looked at for the last several years because the number of volunteers has decreased and the ability for volunteers to respond specifically during the day is very difficult,” Marshall said. “Filling these positions

will allow the county to be able to provide supplemental support to respond to calls when volunteers are not available.”

Steuben County Manager Jack Wheeler said the need is caused in part due to volunteer departments no longer being able to find sufficient volunteers to provide critical EMS services.

Marshall said the number of EMS personnel at local volunteer fire departments has decreased in recent years in part due to all of the mandated training required for volunteers to qualify as an EMS provider.

“People are working more jobs now just to make ends meet,” Marshall said. “A lot of people can't put those hours in as a volunteer because they're working more.”

Hammondsport dissolves ambulance corps as county takes over

Nowhere is the issue more evident than in Hammondsport. The lakeside community is dissolving its volunteer ambulance corps and transferring all of its resources — the 77 Pulteney St. building, the ambulances, all the equipment and supplies — to Steuben County through a \$1 purchase agreement.

"Basically, they are going to close their operation and transfer ownership over to Steuben County," Marshall said.

The Hammondsport Ambulance Corps has been officially incorporated since Jan. 5, 1967. Hammondsport Village Mayor Jean Jenson said residents have embraced the change and are very happy a fully operational ambulance corps will be operating in the village.

"The Hammondsport Volunteer Ambulance Corps was in place for well over 40 years, and well supported by the community," Jenson said. "So people are happy they will be able to have that service."

Wheeler said staffing shortfalls in some areas have required neighboring agencies, under mutual aid, to leave their territory and cover other calls, a ripple effect that creates even greater challenges. The new Steuben County employees will provide supplemental service for impacted areas of the county.

“So, it’s a double edged sword when mutual aid is called,” Wheeler said.

Marshall said the Corning, Bath and Hornell areas currently have paid EMS employees so the new employees will work out of the Hammondsport and Woodhull fire departments at the northern and southern ends of the county.

“They will be out of those two locations, but they will cover 24/7, full-time paramedics that respond throughout the county,” Marshall said. “They will provide additional support and cover after hours when some volunteer folks are not available.”

More: [Maleaha Smith appointed United Way of the Southern Tier CEO, to 'tackle most urgent needs'](#)

What EMS positions is Steuben County hiring, and when

The Steuben County Legislature recently authorized the creation of 24 new positions in the office of Emergency Services — eight fulltime EMT positions, eight parttime EMT positions, four fulltime paramedic positions, and four parttime paramedic positions.

Wheeler said Steuben County has been providing EMS service in several rural areas in the county since last summer using temporary part-time employees to get a better idea what the need really was before hiring permanent positions.

“This is kind of the next step in the process,” Wheeler said. “The service level won’t necessarily change because we are currently providing supplemental services. But we can only have temporary hires for so long under state civil service. Now we have a better idea of how many positions are needed to fill those gaps.”

Marshall said Steuben County expects to fill the positions in the next couple of months.

“It will probably be sometime in the range of May or June before the positions are filled,” Marshall said. “Steuben County has hired temporary part-time EMS employees for the past year to better gauge the need and some of those people are interested in a full-time position.”

Wheeler said the approximated cost of the positions is estimated at \$1.1 million, including benefits.

“We did budget \$1.5 million,” Wheeler said. “So, no additional funds will be needed.”

In the meantime, Steuben County will continue with the temporary part-time EMS employees.

“We're not out of time yet,” Wheeler said. “But we need to start the process of hiring some of these folks at permanent EMS positions.”

Wheeler said Steuben County doesn't want to take staff from other county agencies, decreasing their ability to respond.

“We think we are going to be able to do this in a way by hiring people from just outside of Steuben County that may be interested,” Wheeler said. “We've been very successful in having the temporary part-time EMS employees. We think we'll be able to recruit and hire these positions pretty quickly.”