The Wauneta EMS is staffed by volunteers. Members include (from left) LeAnn Hunt, Gary Hunt, Janet Stuckwisch (no longer on squad), Lana Skelton, Greg Stuckwisch (no longer on squad), Luann Rector, Troy Skelton, Melissa Hunt and Kerry Hamilton.

By Sheri Hink

The Wauneta Breeze

Providing emergency medical services (EMS) in a rural setting is never easy, especially when the EMS staff is made up of volunteers. But, Wauneta EMS has been going the extra mile to do just that for about half a century.

It's unclear exactly how long ago Wauneta EMS started, it's been around so long that it's always seemed to be here. Leland DeHart, who served on the squad for 35 years and is now retired from EMS work and living at Heritage of Wauneta, believes it started after World War II, around 1945.

DeHart got his nickname, “Speed,” from his work on the fire department and Wauneta EMS. He says he got too many tickets.

The Wauneta EMS squad currently operates with seven members and take between 80 to 110 calls per year. When the length of time each call takes, an average of six hours, that adds up to 480 to 660 volunteer hours each year.

But, that time given to the community does not factor in the hours and dollars these volunteers spend to receive and maintain their EMS certification.

According to Wauneta EMS captain Troy Skelton, each member pays for their own training. At this point the squad has four nationally registered EMT basics, two EMT basics and one nationally registered paramedic.

Becoming an EMT basic requires eight college credit hours which equates to roughly 132 hours in the classroom and, at today’s tuition rates, $680.

To become a paramedic is quite a bit more involved. It requires 48 credit hours and approximately 4,000 actual hours of classroom and clinical instruction.

So, it’s plain to see that these volunteers give a lot to the community of Wauneta, their time, talent and their treasure.

The members of the Wauneta EMS squad include: Troy Skelton, captain; LeAnn Hunt, secretary; Lana Skelton,

treasurer; Gary Hunt, maintenance officer; Luann Rector, supplies officer; Kerry Hamilton, training officer; and Melissa Hunt.

Squad organization

The Wauneta EMS squad works independently but has a contract with the county where the county provides the equipment and the village of Wauneta supplies the building for the ambulance and the staff.

After each call the squad is paid $32 by the county, which is then split between all members who responded to the call, usually two squad members.

“We have never not gone on a call even though sometimes we’re stretched pretty thin,” said Captain Troy Skelton.

Despite their lean numbers and our rural setting, the Wauneta EMS maintains a response rate similar to EMS squads who operate with paid staffs – roughly six and a half minutes.

The squad also routinely covers all high school and junior high football games in case of an accident.

Wauneta EMS needs help

When asked what the public could do to help Wauneta EMS Captain Troy Skelton was quick to respond. He said they need EMT volunteers.

Skelton said that in the past potential volunteers have expressed concerns of serving as an EMT because of the likelihood they might know the people whose life they are trying to save.

Troy's response? "Bottom line, someone needs to do it."

He said Wauneta EMS needs volunteers who are willing to drop what they are doing and go on a call.

The nice thing is that Wauneta EMS is able to provide all the training for an EMT basic right here in town. Troy Skelton received his instructors certificate a number of years ago so can teach the class through Mid-Plains Community College.

All he needs to start a class is eight people ready to volunteer their time to save someone else's life.

Those interested in learning more about becoming an EMT for Wauneta EMS should call Troy at 308-394-5487.

Series on local service organizations and clubs

This story is part of an ongoing series highlighting service organizations and community clubs in the Wauneta area. The purpose of the series is to inform the public of what local organizations are doing for the community and how they can help.

At the end of the series, Breeze readers will be asked to vote for their favorite organization or club. The organization or club receiving the most votes will be given a $50 donation to use

towards the project of its choice.

Organizations and community clubs interested in being featured in the series should contact the Breeze at 308-394-5389 or waunetabreeze@bwtelcom.net.