



1/2008

## **Ambulance Service in the Big Oak Flat/Groveland Area** by Fire Chief Shane Warner

Recently, I have been asked by many Groveland citizens about the failure of Measure S which appeared on the November ballot. I was also approached before the election by people concerned about how much ambulance service would cost Groveland tax payers. I responded to these questions by providing a glimpse of how services have evolved since the early 1970's and by comparing the kinds of emergency services available today, through the ambulance and fire department, with what was available many years ago. It is a very interesting history.

In the early years Boise Cascade developers/Pine Mountain Lake Association operated the ambulance service with paid emergency medical technicians (EMT) that provided basic life support. The ambulance was stationed at the old Pine Mountain Lake (PML) firehouse which is now the PML Department of Safety office. The ambulance personnel also doubled as security personnel when they were not needed for emergency medical calls. Each of the security staff carried a radio and pager and could be alerted when an emergency call came into the security office. The Security/EMT personnel also responded outside of PML to the greater Big Oak Flat/Groveland area.

Although it worked initially, the rising costs of servicing the ambulance, training security staff, and the liability involved pushed PML to look elsewhere for an agency that could provide the needed services. Due to budget constraints PML looked into having a Modesto firm provide the ambulance and security service. They bid on the security contract but refused to take on the ambulance service because of the liability.

When it appeared that this needed emergency service was going to be discontinued, concerned citizens formed a group called South Side Emergency Medical Services Association (SEMSA). Their goal was to keep an ambulance service in the Big Oak Flat/Groveland area. They applied and received a grant which enabled them to start a basic life support ambulance with volunteer emergency medical technicians.

In 1988 the Groveland Community Services District Board passed a resolution to oversee the equipment, supplies, maintenance, and finances for the ambulance and entered into partnership with the Manteca ambulance service to supply paramedic and EMT personnel. This continued for ten years but in the years that followed the ambulance eventually was left in the hands of Tuolumne County Health Services.

Voters in the Big Oak Flat/Groveland area passed an ambulance tax with a 90% affirmative vote that started an assessment in 1988 that will continue until June of 2008. This tax subsidized the ambulance service and guaranteed that a paramedic level of service would exist in South Tuolumne County.

I recently gathered some Big Oak Flat/Groveland area statistics based on the 2000 census. At that time 56% of our population was fifty years of age or older and the median age was 53.8 years. I think these statistics show that it is vital to our area citizens that we have a full-time ambulance with a paramedic on duty.

The reduction or loss of ambulance services would directly affect the Groveland Fire Department. We would have longer on-scene times waiting from fifteen to forty-five minutes for an ambulance from Coulterville or Sonora. Fire Department First Responders and EMT's provide initial basic life support. Tuolumne County Ambulance personnel provide transport and advanced life support such as administering IV's and medication. Without the additional services of the ambulance, life threatening emergencies could have undesirable outcomes.

When I took the position of Fire Chief, I morally and ethically took on the responsibility of looking out for the best interest of the residents of Big Oak Flat/Groveland so I am extremely concerned about the future of emergency services available in our District. I was encouraged to hear that District Supervisor Mark Thornton has proposed a citizen's committee to address this issue. Our community needs to work together to find solutions that will keep emergency services available in our area.

I have been in the fire service for twenty-one years and never thought one of my own family members would need the ambulance or the Fire Department. But we have used the emergency medical system and it saved my family member's life. When this happened to my family I could not have put a price tag on having the services available when we needed them.