



# IN SERVICE

## COMMUNITY SERVICE TAKES ON MANY FORMS at Niagara EMS

Too often in EMS, “emergency” and “medical” seem to take priority over “service.” Not so at Niagara EMS, a program of the Niagara Region Public Health Department in the Niagara Region of Ontario, Canada.

“Performing a whole host of community services activities is a benefit to everyone,” said Niagara EMS Communications Coordinator Dan Pilon.

As part of EMS Week last year, Niagara EMS offered two car seat clinics, in which medics taught people to properly install infant car seats in their vehicles. They also collected donations from the community in an attempt to fill up an entire ambulance with food, which they donated to a food bank.

“These events allow our paramedics to get outside of the vehicle and really puts a public face on what we do,” Pilon said.

Although many EMS services open themselves up to the community during EMS Week, community service should not end there, advised Pilon. “EMS Week is an important piece but

activities throughout the year, including the popular Operation Christmas Child. In this annual effort, Niagara EMS teams up with the Niagara Paramedic Association, St. John Ambulance and the Canadian Armed Forces to assist children in underprivileged countries by providing them with shoeboxes full of items to open on Christmas. The boxes are filled by local children and then picked up at local schools by an emergency vehicle.

“This is not an EMS Week activity and yet our paramedics are involved with it,” Pilon said. “There’s a real sense of community there. They would do it regardless if it was celebration of the week or not.”

Koats for Kids is another popular community service activity. Every fall, Niagara community residents are urged to donate unused or outgrown coats to help keep children and adults warm during the winter months. Several dry cleaning establishments volunteer their businesses as a drop-off depot where the items are cleaned. Representatives from Niagara EMS then pick up the coats using an out-of-service ambulance and deliver them to a distribution center.

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I caution about planning everything just around that day,” he noted. “It’s important because it allows us to bring everything together, but at the same time, we want to ensure that we’re doing things year-round as well.”

Niagara EMS conducts a number of community service

of responsibility to their community,” Pilon said. “They’re always very much involved whether they are doing something for EMS Week or not.”

Pilon added that although community involvement can be a huge undertaking, in the end you’ll reap great benefits. “It’s something that you can’t place a dollar value on,” he said. “By getting involved, you will increase the visibility of your service in your local community and it will also personalize your service. There’s plenty of value in that.”

Performing community service activities is especially important for paramedics, Pilon added. “Paramedics are consistently playing a game of catch-up *per se* with the other emergency services, like fire and police, because we are a relatively new service,” he said. “These are the types of things where it’s necessary to provide education to the public about what it is that we do.”

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