Columbia EMS Celebrates 40 Years of Emergency Care, Dedicates New Ambulance

BY KRISTIN STERLING

For the past 40 years a group of Columbia students have been dedicated to helping those in need of emergency medical services, both on campus and in the local community. To celebrate the milestone anniversary, Columbia University Emergency Medical Service (EMS), known more affectionately around campus as CAVA, dedicated a brand new ambulance.

The 50 student volunteers that comprise CAVA are on-call 24-hours a day and are expanding their coverage for the full year, including summer break and University holidays. These fully-trained, New York State certified emergency medical technicians respond to 700 emergency dispatches a year, ranging from fractures and ankle sprains to substance abuse, and chest and abdominal pains. Many think CAVA operates only on campus, but their service area is between 110th and 125th Streets from Riverside to Morningside Drives. CAVA is nationally-recognized as a leading volunteer ambulance corps by the National Collegiate EMS Foundation.

The student volunteers work closely with Health Services, which provides medical supervision and administrative support, and Security, which takes the emergency telephone calls, dispatches the ambulance and offers resources while volunteers provide medical intervention. What sets Columbia’s EMS apart from other university’s emergency crews? The answer is clear—the dedication of the students.

“Everyone who is part of CAVA has a strong will for community service,” says Jordan Brafman, CC’04, SIPA ’05, and director of Columbia University EMS for 2003. “Members look inward and accept the opportunity to hone teamwork, problem solving and critical thinking skills and develop as a leader. CAVA is a non-partisan organization that seeks to help everyone on this campus. There aren’t many services like that.”

During a recent program celebrating CAVA’s 40th anniversary, former CAVA director, Joshua Marks (CC’03, Jefferson Medical College ’07), offered several reasons why it is held in such high esteem: the low response time of 4.7 minutes; campus familiarity; the ability to offer unparalleled continuity of care and routine follow-up; the opportunity for volunteers to gain an invaluable learning experience while helping fellow students, and most importantly according to Marks, because of the caring of the volunteer members.

Much has changed at CAVA since it unofficially began in 1962, when a staff member at the School of Engineering and Applied Science (SEAS) was injured and his colleagues helped rush him to the hospital. In the early years, a volunteer crew of Engineering faculty and staff assisted other colleagues in need around campus. During the summer of 1972, a suspended student shot a dean near Hamilton Hall. Columbia’s volunteer emergency medical team quickly responded to help the dean and to commander a station wagon to transport him to St. Luke’s Hospital. The dean recovered and the emergency response team gained University-wide recognition. In 1974, SEAS staff retrofitted a van as the group’s first official vehicle.

Those vehicles hardly compare to the newly dedicated state-of-the-art ambulance. The ambulance, which was tailored specifically to suit Columbia’s needs as an urban training corps, includes more space for EMTs to provide quality care, updated audible and visual emergency warning devices and better mirrors to improve safety and visibility. It also has climate-controlled storage for life saving medications and new portable equipment such as a suction unit and cardiac defibrillator.

This is the first new ambulance for Columbia in 10 years. CAVA volunteers spent three and a half years working with Health Services and Security to detail the specifications, select a vendor and secure the necessary funding. Current CAVA members and alumni agree the new vehicle was worth the wait.

To learn more about CAVA, or how to become a volunteer, visit www.columbia.edu/cu/cava

Above, Josh Marks, previous CAVA director, and Jordan Brafman, current director, are happy their efforts to acquire a new ambulance have paid off. At right, the new ambulance.

Thank You!

The Columbia 250 office would like to thank all of our colleagues and volunteers who helped make Opening Weekend a resounding success. More than 300 staff, faculty, students and alumni volunteered that weekend.

We would like to extend a special thank you to members of the following offices, without whose guidance, support, and long hours, Opening Weekend would not have been possible.

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