

Paramedics respond on two wheels

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Renfrew – Next time you are watching a triathlon or bike race or taking part in a large scale outdoor event, chances are you will see a new addition to the field.

The County of Renfrew's paramedic service will soon be administering patient care on bicycles as part of its overall strategy to deliver timely medical aid in unique outdoor situations.

A new bicycle paramedic service recently completed training at the Renfrew land ambulance base. The core group of 26 paramedics underwent 12 hours of classroom and practical training under the supervision of Renfrew Commander Steve Osipenko.

Commander Osipenko explains the rationale for the new delivery of service is based on a model used by the City of Ottawa, but adapted to the rural terrain of Renfrew County.

"We introduced the new branch of the service at the recent Barry's Bay Triathlon and it was viewed as very successful," Mr. Osipenko explained.

"We modelled our bike patrol after the City of Ottawa. One of our paramedics, Derek Davis, is also a member of the Ottawa paramedic service, and he has been a great resource in training our members."

One of the goals of the bike service is to not only have the ability and flexibility for quick response in large mobile outdoor events, but also promote bike safety and active transportation for the residents of the county.

"We feel it is a great model for kids and parents when they see our paramedics out on bicycles wearing helmets and being active," he said. "In addition to taking part in races and recreational events, we expect to be highly visible at outdoor events like the annual Renfrew Bluegrass Festival and Calabogie Bluesfest."

Both these established events attract between 3,000 and 20,000 participants.

One of the goals of the bike service is to arrive on scene quickly by navigat-

ing through large crowds of people. Once they arrive, the paramedics will be able to assess and triage a patient on site. After the initial care is administered, an ambulance will be able to arrive on scene and transport the patient if required.

In addition to medical response, the paramedics will actually bike alongside joggers and cyclists in competitive races throughout the county.

"One of the benefits of the bike patrols is to provide quick response to a situation," Mr. Osipenko said. "It does not require extra staffing, and the service will complement our regular platoon system."

It is anticipated the bike service will run between May and late October. It will not be a winter or bad weather service. Since it is the first year of the service, it will be monitored for both effectiveness and community response. Mr. Osipenko is confident local residents and tourists will be impressed by the new level of service.

The bikes are set up to provide a full service call.

Two bags are attached to the bike with enough equipment to respond to common situations. Among the equipment in the bags are defibrillators, heart monitors, an oxygen tank and other equipment used for immediate triage situations. The bags weigh approximately 25 pounds.

It is not all the equipment found on a traditional stretcher response, but according to Mr. Osipenko, the goal of the service is to respond quickly in

a crowded situation and prepare the patient for transport if required.

The bikes are purchased and serviced by local bike distributors.

"Part of our mandate is to promote physical activity and a healthy approach to transportation, so we are drawing on local partners involved in the county's

Active Transportation Strategy in order to lead by example," Mr. Osipenko said.

"With an emphasis on immediate patient care, combined with health promotion, this new service will be a great addition to our overall paramedic response capabilities," Mr. Osipenko concluded.



Paramedic Chris Day leads the way as members of the new Renfrew County Paramedic bike patrol take part in a group cycling exercise through the town of Renfrew. The group tour was part of their training in order to qualify for the unit.



Paramedic Dave Lacroix displays the bike, equipment and uniform that residents around the county will soon be seeing at large outdoor events as the County of Renfrew Paramedic Service launches its new bike patrol unit.