

# Alton Fire Chief discusses first day of new ambulance service

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer  
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**ALTON** - Alton Fire Chief **Bernie Sebold** said his department made seven patient transports during the first day of its new ambulance service.

The service, which was announced on June 1, 2016, was scheduled to be in operation on or before April 1, 2017. Sebold said patients were transported to both **Alton Memorial** and **St. Anthony's** hospitals Tuesday and said things are operating smoothly. The department recently purchased two Chevrolet ambulances from a dealer in Pennsylvania equipped with power stretchers for a price of \$160,000 for the pair. Sebold hopes that cost will soon be offset by patient transports.

"That is the cost of one brand new ambulance of comparable size and design," Sebold said. "The **City of Alton** passed an ordinance, creating a fee schedule for our transports."

Transport costs will be: \$500 for basic life support transport, \$750 for advanced life support transport one and \$800 for advance life support two. As much as 70 percent of those fees will be given to the Firefighters' Pension Fund, which is currently in debt more than \$35 million, Sebold said. The city will still make its contribution to the fund. The remaining 30 percent will go towards maintenance of the ambulance program.

"It isn't a short-term fix, but it will help in the long term," Sebold said of the new ambulance contribution to the Firefighters' Pension Fund.

Currently, one ambulance is being utilized while the other is acting as a sort of backup in case the primary ambulance is undergoing maintenance or is otherwise unable to respond to calls. Sebold said no additional personnel are required for the new ambulances, saying most of the fire department personnel are already trained to staff one.

"A lot of our firefighters have worked in the past or currently work in part-time capacities for ambulance services," he said. "They're well-versed in how to provide ambulance care. Others had focused training on giving additional radio reports to hospitals. Those are called inbound patient reports."

If an ambulance is needed, yet Alton's has already been dispatched or is doing a transport, Sebold said dispatchers will contact **LifeStar** on the west side of town or **Alton Memorial Ambulance** service on the east side of town. Sebold said the Alton Fire Department's positive relationship with LifeStar and Alton Memorial Ambulance will continue as it has in the past.

"The same boundary lines in Alton are in place for both Alton Memorial and LifeStar," Sebold said.

When purchasing the ambulances, Sebold said most of the required equipment was already stocked on ladder trucks. He said the department would save on fuel with the

ambulance service as well. He said an ambulance is a lot more fuel efficient than a large ladder truck usually dispatched to scenes. The Alton Fire Department has also been doing paramedic rescue service since 1985.

Sebold said he estimates a "best case scenario" gross of \$500,000 this year for the ambulance service. That number is based on Granite City's ambulance service, which serves a similar population of a similar economic background from a similar sized department. Sebold said **Granite City** grossed approximately \$1 million last year from their service, which runs two ambulances.

Billing for the transports is handled by **Andres Medical Billing** of **Arlington Heights, Illinois**.

[Dan Brannan also contributed to this story.](#)