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## Emergency transport company speeds past competition

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DARTMOUTH — Since its birth in early 2008, STAT/SouthCoast EMS, a Dartmouth-based emergency and non-emergency medical transportation company, has emerged as a competitive young business.

"We're growing. We're really lucky to be growing for the past three years in spite of the economy," said Carol Mansfield, owner and CEO.

About a year ago, STAT/SouthCoast extended its services into Rhode Island by opening a Newport branch and adding to its previous four Massachusetts locations: New Bedford, Fall River, South Dartmouth and the North Dartmouth corporate office.

Though STAT/SouthCoast's success has been bolstered by certain outside elements, such as the growing elderly population, there is much that has been done proactively within the company to increase its call volume, fleet, and number of employees.

One of the first steps is hiring the right people for the job.

"I have the most qualified guys, a great bunch of guys," said Mansfield, who noted her seasoned staff includes a captain from the Fall River fire department, an Attleboro fire lieutenant, and a Portsmouth fire lieutenant. "They have been with me for a long time, some as long as 17, 18 years."

"We are careful about who we hire," added Mark Haskell, Director of Corporate Development. "We don't hire numbers, we hire people."

STAT/SouthCoast and its mother company, STAT Ambulance, collectively employ about 100 people.

Mansfield, of course, meets her own qualifications.

She originally started working at STAT Ambulance in 1985 as a part-time bookkeeper, while working full time as a practice manager for a urologist, a career she held for 37 years. In 1987, she bought out STAT, and then in 2007, began working there full-time before creating STAT/SouthCoast shortly afterwards. STAT/SouthCoast provides both emergency and non-emergency transportation to hospitals, nursing homes and medical appointments and serves as back up to the towns of Dartmouth, New Bedford and

Fall River, while STAT Ambulance has provided emergency medical service to the town of Dartmouth since 1980.

"I basically serve as my own mutual aid," said Mansfield.

Mansfield also boasts the accomplishment of being the only female owner of an ambulance company in both Massachusetts and Rhode Island. "It's a male-dominated industry," said Mansfield, who generally works 50 to 60 hours a week. "You've got to have thick skin."

Mansfield also always makes sure her staff has the most up-to-date training. In order to make that possible, STAT/SouthCoast has a training division at their corporate office with seating for 40 and space for 40 more. Here, they hold continuing education for staff conducted by the company's own trained and certified employees.

"We bring them up to real world standards," said Haskell. "We have to do it to maintain competent employees."

Along with keeping their staff at the top of their game, it is vital to do the same with their fleet. STAT/SouthCoast is consistently upgrading their vehicles with the latest state-of-the-art equipment.

"We try to stay ahead of the curve," said Haskell. "There's going to be a lot of changes and growth in the next three months."

For example, the business recently purchased a bariatric stretcher which can handle a significant amount of weight — up to 1600 pounds. In addition to the stretcher, they have a new, specially-designed ramp, winch and stretcher system. Four vehicles have been retrofitted for the system.

No other local ambulance company has the ramp or winch, Haskell noted.

Additionally, each vehicle is fitted with a GPS system, which allows the corporate office to know exactly where it is at all times. The company is also in the process of installing cameras in the remote locations in order to monitor them from the corporate location.

"If someone leaves a door open, we'll be able to close it from here," said Haskell.

STAT/SouthCoast was also one of the first area companies to go with electronic medical records in their ambulances. "We're ready to move on the second phase when some other companies haven't even started with it," said Mansfield.

As important as these state-of-the-art additions are, Mansfield stresses the need to also carefully control the company's purchases.

"We have the best equipment, but we shop it," she said. And, Haskell added, "If we don't have the money, we won't spend it."

For example, last summer, the company added over 3,000 square feet by purchasing the second floor of the building they use — but the expansion happened only after they were able to purchase it at a

comfortable price, Mansfield said. It was this addition that allowed them to double their space and create an inhouse training area.

STAT/SouthCoast also recently added to their ambulance fleet, bringing their total to 14 ambulances. Two are kept at the New Bedford, Newport, and Fall River locations, and one in South Dartmouth. They also have six wheelchair vans and a Lincoln Town Car for those who don't require a wheelchair van but still need to get around or for non-medical trips. In the past, they have provided transportation for trips to Vermont and New York City.

Though the business is a laborious endeavor, for Mansfield it's a labor of love.

"I love every minute of it," she said. "You couldn't do it if you didn't."