

## St. James Fire Department seeking help

# Biggest need is EMS volunteers

By **Eliot Duke**  
Staff Writer

The St. James Fire Department (SJFD) relies on its volunteers to help provide services for the community.

Many people in St. James volunteer their time, but the ones at the fire department often do so in the early morning hours, in bad weather, on weekends, holidays and whenever help is needed.

“There is a lot of giving back at the department,” Lt. Maggie Finnerin said. “There is a camaraderie in the department. We go out in the middle of the night and pick people up off the floor or drive them to the hospital, that kind of stuff. That’s our giving back.”

SJFD currently has a need for additional volunteers to assist in several areas of the department as well as serve on an important committee that is dedicated to protecting homes from wildfires. While the department has a full compliment of Fire Police volunteers, SJFD wants to recruit additional EMS personnel. EMS crews already have responded to more than 100 calls this year, including 19 transports to the hospital. The numbers continue to reflect an increase in call volume as EMS received more than 800 calls last year and are on a similar pace again this year.

### EMS volunteers ‘biggest need’

“We’re desperately in need of EMS volunteers,” said Jim Carey, SJFD public information officer. “We’re in need of firefighters too, but the biggest need is EMS because of the number of people involved, the number of calls coming in and the workload they already have.”

With 22 EMS volunteers now available, Finnerin said the department ideally would like to have at least 30. The required training includes taking a basic level certification course at Brunswick Community College that consists of 200 hours. SJFD runs a basic EMS unit that limits the medical services it can perform. The semester-long course provides a background in medicine, the cardiovascular system, infections and infectious diseases. Finnerin said the only real qualification a person needs to become an EMS volunteer is the desire to learn.

“It’s called ‘pre-hospital medicine,’” said Finnerin. “We have a level of practice we can go to that we can’t go above. We can’t

diagnose. We’re not physicians.

“We’re not able to give injections or put IV lines in. We do vitals, blood sugar levels, we recognize strokes and head injuries, we assess the patient and figure what they require to get from here to there.”

### ‘We’re coming from home’

Brunswick County EMS crews have a paramedic on every ambulance, but there are times when the SJFD can respond to the situation much quicker and that’s when the training becomes vitally important.

“We can get to people quicker,” said Finnerin. “We can get them to where they need to go to get the proper treatment.”

She added that county EMS trucks are running at a bare minimum right now because they need people too, so St. James EMS is getting to St. James residents faster than the county EMS because they’re coming from farther away.

“We’re coming from home,” she said. “We get the call, we come (to the station), we go out.”

### Firewise seeking committee member

The Town of St. James Firewise Committee also is looking for a volunteer to fill a vacancy. The committee is committed to informing town residents of the risks associated with wildfires and ways to protect their property. Firewise members work with SJFD, the Property Owner’s Association, the St. James Emergency Management team and the developer along with state and county officials to identify and address fire risks.

There are no specific requirements to join the committee, but members often bring relevant experience in the areas of forestry, fire safety, wildlife biology, habitat management, botany, landscaping, risk assessment and communication, and public education. Committee members normally dedicate approximately 10 hours a month. Firewise have received color-coded wildfire threat charts and plan to post them at the two St. James fire stations.

Residents interested in joining the committee can send a letter of interest to Town Clerk Laura Williams at [lwilliams@stjames.town](mailto:lwilliams@stjames.town).

Potential volunteers for the SJFD can call 910-253-9990.