Photo courtesy of Platteville Regional Chamber of Commerce

PLATTEVILLE, WI

Southwest Health EMS, Platteville, Wis

Platteville has its roots as a commerce center, fueled by lead and zinc ore mining in the early 19th century. Technical expertise associated with extracting minerals helped found the local mining- and teachers' college in 1866. A century later, the institution was renamed UW-Platteville -- academic home today for about 7,000 students. Education and agriculture have long since eclipsed mining as the dominant industries in Platteville, the largest city in Grant County, which borders Iowa and Illinois.

Like EMS in many communities, medical transports were once handled by the local funeral home. In 1966, Platteville City Police bought an ambulance and equipment from a local mortician and began responding to calls. In 1983, the Platteville Area Ambulance Service was formed with the rigs housed in the municipal garage. The first responders were volunteers. In 1986, the City erected a dedicated building for the Service. In 1994, a part-time director was added.

In May 2015, the City of Platteville struck a partnership with Southwest Health -- an off-shoot of the 1985 consolidation of Platteville Municipal Hospital and Cuba City Medical Center -- to manage EMS. For its part, Southwest Health pledged to elevate EMS to paramedic level and construct a new 8,500-sq.ft. facility attached to the hospital to house the service. Brian Allen, former director of Platteville EMS, was hired to manage it.

For Allen, the decision to subscribe to Aladtec, for then- Platteville EMS, was all about saving time and eliminating the drudgery and inconsistent communications inherent with their old "paper and pencil" scheduling routine.

Pre-Aladtec, the protocol was to keep two "master schedules." One resided at the ambulance station and the other with Platteville Police, who dispatch for the service. At the time, three EMTs were scheduled on 12-hour shifts. When daily pager tests were conducted at 6 am and 6 pm, the dispatcher would announce who was on-duty -- assuming the schedule was up to date.

Neighboring agencies also using Aladtec:
Southwest Health Hospital, Platteville; Fennimore Rescue Squad, Fennimore; Paramount Emergency Medical Services, Dubuque (IA); Rural Medical Ambulance Service, Darlington; Galena Area EMS District, Galena (IL); Dodgeville Area Ambulance Service, Dodgeville; Boscobel EMS, Boscobel; Guttenberg Ambulance Service, Gutttenberg (IA); Elizabeth Community Ambulance Service, Inc., Elizabeth (IL); Stockton EMS, Stockton (IL); Arena EMS, Arena; Mount Horeb Area Joint Fire Dept., Mount Horeb; Richland County Ambulance Service, Richland Center; Green County EMS, Monroe; and Clayton County Sheriff's Dept., St. Olaf (IA)

Department Info:

Roster: Full-time director, full-time EMS/EM Coordinator, 12 full-time, 14 part-time and casual on-call paramedics and EMTs.

Calls: about 1,500 in 2018.

Service area: Approx. 140 sq. miles. Pop. approx. 17,000. Coverage area includes the City of Platteville and seven neighboring townships -- Ellenboro, Harrison, Lima, Platteville, and Smelser in Grant County. Also, Belmont and Elk Grove in Lafayette County.

Apparatus: 3 ambulances and a command vehicle.

Challenges: UW-Platteville with a seasonal student population of about 7,000, hazards inherent with farms and ag-related businesses.

Special Skills: Southwest's roster of medics includes several firefighters, and a swift water rescue technician who is part of the Southwest Wisconsin Technical Rescue Team. Some members also work with other larger agencies.

Aladtec users since 2012

Platteville fire- and EMS personnel extricate the driver of a overturned milk truck. Photo by Steve Prestegard, courtesy of the Platteville Journal

"When you have a paper-and-pencil schedule, you have to make a copy of it, and you have 10 of them floating around. You hope the one that's the master is the most current. Well, (members) make the change at the one at the building but forget to call the Police Department or vice-versa, and you'd get there and like -- 'Who's our third person because they're not here? At that time we were running three-person crews because it was an on-call basis instead of the full-time department that we are now, so it's like -- Who is the other person? Who are we waiting for? It just cut down the confusion immensely -- for me, the staff, the police department -- everybody."

Once they moved to Aladtec, Allen included Dispatch as a "member" so staff can log-in and see who's working.

"I wouldn't have to send them paper copies of the schedules where all the changes had been made; they'd just look in to see who was on and page it out. Even now, when we have two full-time crews, Dispatch still has the ability to log-in and look -- even though we're not part of the City anymore," said Allen.

Allen estimates Aladtec's functionality yields 10-15 hours per month in time savings.
"Easily. I remember the paper and pencil and how much I hated it, so much so, that the assistant administrator at the time was like -- 'It can't be that bad?'

"It's all yours. You've just inherited it. And after the first one, he said --' You're right. I know why you don't like this.' Then we went to (Aladtec) and he's like -- 'This is so nice! ' Between the two of us, we would probably spend 20 hours a month working on the schedule. And then after we got Aladtec, he would sit down (for four or five hours), and he had (the schedule) all done."
Bringing members along to Aladtec wasn't difficult, Allen recalls.

"They really took to it. We sat down at one of our staff meetings and showed them everything there was with it. I pulled up the demo, and we went through how to sign up for shifts, how to sign up for availability…just kind of really went through everything. The assistant administrator and I played with it for a time to become familiar, so that we could then start rolling it out to the staff, showing them, and answering their questions."

Beyond scheduling, Allen likes the Aladtec's functionality with forms. "We use the Forms feature a lot. All of our daily rig-checks are done through Aladtec. We have created forms for controlled substances, and we have a couple of forms for administration of compliance stock (controlled substances out of balance, medications sent by a sending facility) if a facility gives us a controlled substance that's not on our list."
He also likes the fact there's plenty of storage for saving documents indefinitely, but often also prints controlled substance entries because the hospital pharmacy must retain it for DEA compliance. Allen also has a form for tracking equipment issued to new members and another for items obtained later.

Shift reminders? "Some staff use them, Some don't."

He uses the Member Database to track member licenses and certifications.

He doesn't often use the Mandatory Message function and hasn't yet activated the Extra Hours feature.

"Not all of my staff has elected to receive text messages through the system. Before we were full-time, we would have open shifts and, some of them just got to the point where (they weren't able to respond) "especially the one who lives in LaCrosse" (100 miles away), so he took his phone number out.

"They have all shared their personal e-mail accounts with me so I can send a blast message out, and I know they're going to see it…"

On Allen's "wish-list" is a feature through which members can sign-up for on-call time, outside of the regular repeats and rotation without triggering overtime alerts.

"I just like the record-keeping, and it logs everything. I've had to go back and look to see when something changed. I can go back and see (exactly when an entry was made)," said Allen. "And I like the accessibility."

Brian Allen

Brian Allen worked as a Grant County 911 dispatcher while earning a Bachelors degree in Criminal Justice from UW-Platteville. He later earned a Masters degree in Public Service (Public Safety Leadership) from Capella University, and a paramedic certification from Northeast Iowa Community College. Allen served six years as EMS Director for the City of Platteville before Southwest Health acquired Platteville EMS in 2015. He was then named Director of EMS and Emergency Management. Allen serves as an adjunct faculty member at Southwest Technical College in Fennimore and is an advisory board member at the college.

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