

## COLUMNS

# Notes From the SEFD: It's More Than a Ride



by Eddie McArthur  
June 6, 2024



Two SEFD firefighters demonstrate the power load gurney that safely loads patients into the ambulances. Photo by Eddie McArthur

Most calls received at Sonoita-Elgin Fire District (SEFD) are not fire calls. Ambulance calls, ranging from a relatively simple transport to a lifesaving situation, are a big part of what we do. Recently one of our crews delivered a baby!

Two of the three shifts at SEFD have two paramedics, and the third shift will have a second paramedic as soon as that individual finishes a certification. In an area like ours, some distance from medical care, having fully trained personnel and well-equipped transport can mean the difference between life and death.

Our three ambulances are all ALS—Advanced Life Support—meaning they carry extra equipment and supplies not found in a BLS or Basic Life Support-equipped ambulance. Paramedics, unlike EMTs, can administer medications for cardiac issues, seizures and EPIs. Specialized storage requirements do not allow us to carry blood products or anti-venom. Each ambulance carries oxygen as well as a plethora of consumables like bandages.

The Zoll Monitor is perhaps the most important piece of advanced equipment onboard. With this device, available in all our units, we have the ability to continuously monitor a patient’s heart rhythm and shock the heart as needed, as well as monitoring and responding to respirations. It is continuously accurate in a moving vehicle and under high stress.

Our ambulances are also equipped with power-load gurneys. This equipment lifts and loads the gurney and patient into and out of the ambulance. The risk of unstable loading on rough terrain is eliminated, the patient is fully supported throughout and injury to our personnel is decreased. This piece of equipment has reduced back injuries to our firefighters.

The National Fire Protection Association, which sets standards for “best practices” in the world of fire and ambulance service, suggests that the service life of an ambulance is ten years. This is not realistic for an agency of our size, so maintenance is especially important. SEFD’s oldest unit, 831, or Apollo, is vintage 2012, and is named Apollo due to having come from the Johnson Space Center where it got little use. 832, known as B2, is a 2016, and 833, or Gracie, is a 2016. Gracie is a 4-wheel drive vehicle. Each is a Type 1, meaning a truck front with a built out box on back. None were purchased new.

An unequipped or shell ambulance would cost over \$125,000 new, over \$350,000 fully equipped. In addition, lead time to actually receive the vehicle is in the 24-36 month range. Purchase and maintenance are hugely expensive. This year the Arizona legislature passed a mandate requiring all ambulance transport to have a permanently installed real time GPS. We have been using an iPad for this purpose, but now are required to buy and install a permanent fixture for each ambulance. The State does not fund this, or other, mandates.

For now, we are carefully maintaining all our equipment while setting aside funds to be used for repairs and eventual replacement.