

AROUND THE REGION: Laidlaw buys northern ambulance service

Ambulance services sold to private company; will keep staff

BY DAWN LIERSCH
STAFF WRITER

Beaverton and District Ambulance Service Ltd. has sold its operation to a large private company owned by Laidlaw Inc.

Canadian Medical Response (CMR), a division of Burlington-based Laidlaw Inc., announced Monday it had purchased the locally owned Beaverton Ambulance company which serves Queensville, Keswick, Sutton, Beaverton and Fenelon Falls.

It has also acquired Brant County Ambulance Service in Brantford and Paris, Ont.

"We now have a nice ribbon of services throughout southern Ontario," said Diane Dennis Finley, CMR's area general manager, adding CMR was interested in the Beaverton service because of the quality of staff. There won't be any staffing or management changes, she said.

"We value the employees — they know the patients, they know the streets. That's why we bought the company — because of the high skilled level of dedication."

CMR is Canada's largest private provider of ambulance services, owning several big operations in southern Ontario, including Hamilton, Halton and Mississauga. Its sister company, American Medical Response, is the largest private ambulance company in the U.S., performing about 5-1/2 million patient transports a year in more than 180 communities.

Dave Lyons, manager and former co-owner of Beaverton Ambulance, said CMR's good reputation and impressive background in the ambulance business was a factor in the sale.

"We were looking for a company with a reputation and a history of providing excellent ambulance service," he said.

"We wanted to find a company that would look after existing staff. And CMR has excellent opportunities to improve training."

Dennis Finley said staff response following announcement of the takeover was positive and overwhelming.

Speaking on behalf of paramedics, Tim Balsdon, a supervisor at the Queensville station, said staff are pleased their existing contract will be honoured by the new owner and are excited about the potential for improved training and equipment through CMR.

ships with other companies and its relationship with American Medical Response (AMR). Due to provincial downloading, municipalities will assume operation of ambulance service in 2000.

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Paramedics are hoping for funding of advanced life support training, which would allow them to administer IVs and medicines and to perform procedures that would clear air passages.

Dennis Finley explained, should York and Durham regions and Victoria County — the areas Beaverton services — decide to keep CMR on in the future as the ambulance service provider, the company would have access to advanced training and sophisticated equipment through its partner-

residents will see the same.

"Because of CMR's relationship with American Medical Response, we've been able to borrow training videos and use its expertise for dispatching vehicles. We can see how they do things in America and see if there are areas we can improve on here," he said.

"Our staff had looked at this as an opportunity for advancement, and now they've seen it in play. Within a small community, CMR can certainly enhance the service."

Ross said staff also have more opportunities to advance with CMR because the company has positions related to training, vehicles and human resources. Staff may also be able to transfer to other divisions.

"Some still think of Laidlaw as the school bus, but that's because they don't know its history in ambulance service. People in the ambulance industry know (AMR) has the reputation of being No. 1 in the world," he said.

"What they do see, is that no one has been laid off or fired. It has been business as usual."

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Evenflo carseats have warnings on the back stating "Never leave child unattended", Maidment added.

"The parents should have known that this was not meant to be used for sleeping because someone would not continually watch while a child slept in the seat," he said. The claims must still be proven in court.

The parents' lawyer, Frank Gomberg, said Zachary died

Car seat manufacturer countersues parents in baby's death

BY RICK VANDERLINDE
STAFF WRITER

Giant American car-seat manufacturer Evenflo claims the parents of a baby who strangled to death while sleeping in one of their infant carriers are at fault.

The Florida-based corporation makes the claim in a countersuit against Laura Morrison and Scott Rogers, the parents of seven-month-old Zachary Morrison-Rogers.

Zachary died after his babysitter found him hanging by the straps of an Evenflo Joyride carseat where the babysitter had placed him for a nap in her private daycare on April 1, 1997.

Evenflo claims the baby's parents allowed the caregiver to use the carseat for Zachary's naps, even though he was about two pounds overweight.

They no longer used the infant carrier to transport Zachary in

their family car. The countersuit also claims the parents should have given the babysitter an instruction booklet that came with the seat.

Evenflo lawyer Scott Maidment said the parents should have provided the babysitter with a crib or cradle for their son's daytime naps.

"These seats are not meant to be used as cribs," he said. "This carseat was being improperly used."

because the seatbelt buckle came undone, not because he was slightly overweight or sleeping in the seat. "This countersuit is a crock that stands no prospect of being successful," he said.

"This is very bad judgment on the part of Evenflo. They're adding fuel to an incendiary situation by putting blame on the victims."

Morrison and Rogers filed a \$9-million negligence causing death suit against Evenflo.

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