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# West Carleton Review

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JESSICA CUNHA/METROLAND  
**Father Stewart Murray, left, Connie Higginson-Murray, centre and Diana Carson all say they are thrilled with the new location of the West Carleton Food Access Centre. Father Murray first brought the concept of a food bank to West Carleton. For more, see Page 3.**

## Shortage of paramedics leaves rural areas uncovered

'They're so busy in the core they're taking the rural ambulances': councillor

**Jessica Cunha**  
 jessica.cunha@metroland.com

Paramedics stationed in West Carleton and other rural communities in Ottawa are responding to more calls in the city, leaving the rural sectors to be covered by neighbouring municipalities. Ambulances based at the West Carleton Community Complex in Kinburn and at the depot on Riddell Drive aren't staying long in their coverage areas and some residents are concerned about response times if emergency services are

needed. Dunrobin Shore resident Susan Christy called 911 on Feb. 3 and 8 when her seven-year-old daughter had seizures. "My daughter has epilepsy," said Christy. "We've had to call paramedics twice in the last two weeks." During one of her daughter's seizures only one paramedic showed up when Christy called 911. They had to wait an additional 45 minutes for a second paramedic to arrive before her daughter could be transported to hospital. Christy said the paramedics cautioned her that service levels wouldn't be the same; ambulances likely won't be responding from Kinburn and Dunrobin but from further away – such as Arnprior or Kanata – resulting in a longer wait time.

See NEIGHBOURING, page 7

## West Carleton loses community booster

**Staff**

West Carleton is mourning the death of one of its most well-known and admired residents. The flags at the West Carleton Client Service Centre were lowered to half-mast from sunrise to sunset on Monday,

Feb. 15, the day of the memorial service for the late Bert 'Egbert' Reitsma. Reitsma served as a councillor for Ward 2, Fitzroy, in the former Township of West Carleton from 1974-1982 and 1988-2000 and was a West Carleton Citizen of the Year.

See REITSMA, Page 6

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# Neighbouring municipalities unhappy

Continued from page 1

“The paramedics had given us the impression that there are no paramedics, no trucks, in West Carleton anymore. If we call 911 today we won’t get someone coming from Riddell or Kinburn.”

Request for comment from the Ottawa Paramedic Service was not returned as of the press deadline.

West Carleton-March Coun. Eli El-Chantiry said paramedics are still stationed in West Carleton at the two depots, but are quickly being re-routed to calls in the city.

“We have a shortage of paramedics,” he said. “They’re so busy in the core they’re taking the rural ambulances.”

“The issue is the ambulance is not staying long in our community because they’re covering other areas.”

El-Chantiry said it doesn’t make sense for ambulances to sit idle waiting for local calls when there are so many calls for service in denser areas of Ottawa.

“In Kinburn, they’re sitting there, waiting for calls while downtown can’t pick up fast enough,” he said.

When this happens, neighbouring municipalities have to pick up the slack.

“Paramedics in neighbouring municipalities are complaining because they’re picking up calls for West Carleton,” said El-Chantiry.

The closest ambulance to a call – no matter where it’s originally stationed – must respond and those in Renfrew County aren’t happy.

## LONGER RESPONSE TIMES

Residents of Arnprior can expect longer response times and periodically no ambulance service at all due to a decision made by the City of Ottawa.

The city is reducing ambulance service in rural wards such as West Carleton to service its urban core.



FILE

**Ambulances stationed in West Carleton are responding to more city calls, leaving the rural area to be covered by neighbouring municipalities.**

That means ambulances stationed in Arnprior will likely have to respond more frequently to Kinburn, Constance Bay and beyond, thanks to a provincial rule mandating the nearest available paramedic to respond in an emergency.

Ambulances could be out of town for hours on end while city patients are at downtown hospitals.

Also, because they must leave their radios on, if another call comes from the core while they are there – as the nearest ambulance, they are obliged to attend. It is not unreasonable to see a scenario whereby an Arnprior ambulance spends the better part of a day in Orleans in Ottawa’s east end.

Renfrew county Warden Peter Emon says it will cause problems for neighbouring communities too. When the ambulance is not in town, another will be pulled from Goshen or Renfrew to respond to Arnprior emergencies, which will take way from those areas.

“There’s a fairly huge ripple effect,” Emon said. “We’ll have to examine it.”

Ottawa’s refusal to renew the long-time intermunicipal billing agreement with the County of Renfrew has Emon worried about financial costs too. The city will no longer

compensate the county for the cost of responding to emergency calls.

Renfrew County paramedics visit elderly residents on a regular basis so they can stay longer in their homes. If stretched too thin and must abandoned the visitations, that will mean more federal and provincial tax dollars spent on hospitals that must then house the elderly, Emon said.

The optics of the nation’s capital downloading safety-related services to its rural cousins doesn’t sit well with him.

“It’s a very affluent urbanized setting with a great number of revenue streams,” Emon said. “This is an issue they will have to address.”

The county is in the midst of collecting information on the projected number of calls and the cost to county taxpayers. Once it does, a formal request for explanation will be delivered in late March or April.

Emon hopes the city’s decision will be reversed at the bureaucratic level. But he isn’t convinced it will.

“I hope it gets solved at the staff level, but I expect a political discussion,” Emon said. “They are pretty reasonable neighbours. I certainly hope they will fix the problem once they learn the scope of the problem.”

*With files from Derek Dunn*

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