

RURAL/METRO BUYS JOBS, EXPERTS MORE GROWTH

Arizona-based company has agreed to be acquired by private-equity firm

By WILL ASTOR

The Rochester operation of Arizona-based Rural/Metro Corp. has grown, adding 40 workers in the past year. The emergency medical service provider anticipates similar or greater employment growth in coming months, said Thomas Bonfiglio, its division general manager for Rochester.

Rural/Metro's local employment stands at 450, he said, and most of its workers are emergency medical technicians and paramedics. Between 100 and 150 workers aides in a division that provides staff for certified home health care agencies.

Rural/Metro announced last month that it had struck a deal to be acquired by Warburg Pincus LLC, a private-equity firm, for \$437.8 million in cash. As it did when it acquired Bausch & Lomb Inc., Warburg Pincus plans to take the publicly held Rural/Metro private.

The ownership change will benefit Rural/Metro and bring more resources to the company's Rochester operation, Bonfiglio predicted.

Most of Rural/Metro's business here comes through its contract with Rochester as the emergency medical services provider for all 911 calls within city limits.

More staff were needed to accommodate an uptick in city 911 calls, Bonfiglio said. But for several years Rural/Metro also has provided backup for volunteer ambulance companies in Monroe County's eastern suburbs. Last year it signed mutual-aid agreements to back up the Union Hill and West Webster fire departments in the county's northeast corner, further increasing demand.

The Union Hill Fire Department has two ambulances, and they cannot always fully cover the largely volunteer operation's service area, which includes roughly half of the town of Webster and half of the adjacent town of Ontario in Wayne County, said Jerry Seides, Union Hill deputy chief

of ambulances.

Union Hill and the West Webster Fire Department can sometimes cover for each other, Seides said. But to fully meet the area's emergency services needs, both need to have consistently available backup.

"We're promising service 24/7, and to serve the community we really need to have someone there. (Rural/Metro) stepped up to the plate," Seides said. "They've really done a terrific job."

Rochester City Council recently approved a second one-year extension of Rural/Metro's 911 contract. When it was inked some four years ago and extended last year, the contract had generated considerable heat, sparking a battle between City Council and former Mayor Robert Duffy in 2007 and a court challenge last year.

The mayor initially gave the contract

to Rural/Metro's longtime rival, locally based Monroe Ambulance, which previously had provided backup to the Union Hill and West Webster fire departments as well. The three-year pact allowed for two one-year extensions.

When the first one-year extension to the city 911 contract came up last year, Monroe unsuccessfully challenged the pact in court, complaining in a petition that Rural/Metro had used undue lobbying influence to sway City Council.

The recent extension takes the contract to March 2012, when Bonfiglio hopes to see Rural/Metro again win the bid.

Anticipating a continuing need to add staff, Bonfiglio last fall arranged with Monroe Community College to have prospective EMT candidates trained at MCC's Public Safety Training Facility.

The emergency medical services program normally graduates approximately 375 students a year, said MCC's EMS education manager, Paul Bishop. Many are volunteers with area fire departments or already work in the field, however. The Rural/Metro partnership trains people not previously employed as EMTs.

In the partnership program, the 140-hour course is shortened from 14 weeks to five; students put in eight-hour days of course work four days a week and spend a fifth day working with Rural/Metro crews.

The first class this year graduated 15 of the 20 people who had enrolled. Another class is planned for this summer. After that, Bishop expects to mount two classes a year, providing 30 to 40 recruits annually to the ambulance firm.

astor@rbj.net / 565-546-8303



Bob Cerville
Vice President

Joe Dugan
President & Chief

Joy Ryan Piatnik, Esq.
Chief Operating Officer

Geoff Byrle
Senior Vice President