

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Point of Contact: pio@nwems.org

April 5, 2016, Tomball, Tex. -- For the elderly and people with disabilities, simply getting around can be a challenge. Soon, Tomball-area residents with mobility challenges will have a new way to get where they need to go.

On April 1, 2016, Northwest EMS started the roll-out of its new Mobility Project, adding two wheelchair-accessible vehicles to their existing fleet of emergency ambulances. Northwest EMS is the contracted emergency medical services provider for Harris County Emergency Services District 8, which includes the City of Tomball and portions of unincorporated Harris County.

The funding for the project's first year operating costs and capital expenditures were provided by a grant from the Tomball Regional Health Foundation. "Transportation for the uninsured and elderly has been one of the top priorities to the Tomball Regional Health Foundation Board," said Jack Smith, Chairman of the Board. "To be able to help patients get to their physician appointments and related healthcare visits means we are continuing to help our community and the individuals that live in it."

The Foundation's 2012 Community Health Needs Assessment Report noted a lack of medical transportation services in the Tomball area. Often, residents with mobility needs do not have access to a vehicle or they need door-to-door assistance for what many consider routine travel. The new vehicles will be used for medically-related trips, such as to and from the doctor or home from the hospital.

"We are thrilled to finally have this project off the ground," said Brian Bayani, Chief of Northwest EMS. "The new service will not only improve access to healthcare in the community, but it will also be an important tool in our effective delivery of medical services."

According to Chief Bayani, it is not uncommon for the ambulance to be called because someone ran out of medication and cannot get to the pharmacy or they have not been able to get to their doctor for preventative care. "Historically, the only ways to handle these calls were to either take the patient to the emergency room or let the patient refuse transport and remain at home," Bayani said. "Neither of these fixed the root cause of the problem." These calls tie up an ambulance and an ER bed, decreasing the emergency system's ability to handle more urgent calls. The new mobility services should decrease some of the burden on the system.

The vans will also bring big cost savings for the patients since an ambulance trip and just a short stay in the emergency room can add up to thousands of dollars in medical bills. While there is still a fee for a van trip, it is significantly less than an ambulance ride and financial assistance is available for those riders who can demonstrate financial hardship.

About Northwest EMS:

Northwest EMS is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization providing Emergency Medical Services within the City of Tomball and surrounding areas. Northwest EMS envisions communities where quality of life is enhanced by integrated systems of healthcare and emergency response. Our mission is to reduce the incidence and impact of injury, illness, and catastrophic events in our communities through superior coordinated clinical care, prevention programs, and education.