**Putnam County Emergency Medical Services**

The history of Putnam County Emergency Medical Services (PCEMS) goes back to the 1970s, when Putnam County Operation Life ambulance service was established. The service had its roots in the DePauw Fire Company, which had been founded by students from that university. Before Operation Life, ambulance services in Putnam County were handled by Rector Funeral Home in Greencastle and Whitaker Funeral Home in Cloverdale, both of which sent their hearses to transport patients to Putnam or Clay County Hospitals.

As Putnam County moved toward establishing an emergency medical service, volunteers purchased an ambulance for $14000, and Operation Life became official in May 1974. Using the City of Greencastle’s radio frequency for calls, Operation Life served only central Putnam County. On the original roster were ten DePauw students and six community volunteers, but another 13 students were quickly added over the following months to bring the total roster to 23 medically trained personnel. Residents living outside the area served were urged to contact their local volunteer fire departments for help. Roachdale, for instance, was a thirty-minute drive away, beyond the scope of the new service; to serve the town, Putnam Morgan Hendricks (PMH) ambulance service was created to help serve patients in Northern Putnam County. Whitaker Funeral Home still provided service to Cloverdale and surrounding areas.

Operation Live personnel were trained in Red Cross life saving and first aid techniques through Methodist Hospital and were ready to volunteer their time around the clock and serve the community throughout the year. In November 1974, Operation Life officially changed its name to Putnam County Operation Life (PCOL) Incorporated. Between May and November of that year, PCOL responded to 150 service calls, well on their way to becoming the established ambulance service the county desperately needed.

Over the next several years, more ambulances were purchased, more stations were built, and more people stepped up to serve as EMTs or paramedics. In 2010, Operation Life celebrated 35 years of service to Putnam County citizens and visitors. At that time, there were a combination of 50 paid and volunteer staff members who had established ambulance substations in Bainbridge, Greencastle, and Cloverdale to provide 483 square miles of coverage.

As was the case for many EMS agencies throughout the country, maintaining a self-sustaining budget to keep operations going was difficult. Unlike most public service agencies, EMS agencies are not tax-funded. Moreover, insurance company reimbursements came nowhere near covering the cost of providing EMS coverage.

In order to ensure continued EMS coverage, Putnam County Operation Life reached out to Putnam County officials to discuss possibly transitioning the from a private, non-for-profit ambulance agency to a county-based municipal one. To save the service, in 2019 Putnam County government officials agreed to the transition, and on January 1, 2020, Putnam County EMS as we know it today was born. That 2020 became the year of COVID-19 made the transition difficult, especially since the new leadership was hired just a few days before the pandemic was officially declared.

Even though the newly formed union had a rough start, PCEMS has been successful at acquiring updated equipment. New ambulances were purchased along with power cots to handle larger patients. In addition, LUCAS devices were placed on every ambulance at some local volunteer fire departments to provide better response to individuals in cardiac arrest.

Currently PCEMS staffs three advanced life support ambulances with one each stationed in Bainbridge, Greencastle, and Cloverdale all day every day, throughout the year, as well as two EMS intercept vehicles Monday through Friday during the day. PCEMS now employs 24 full-time EMT basics and paramedics, two administrators, and 12 part-time providers. The agency covers all 911 EMS services throughout Putnam County, including special events that include EMS coverage at local raceways, high school and college football games, and attends multiple community outreach events throughout the year.