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EMS Workers Get Chance to be Paramedics

Training will help to alleviate shortage

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Seeking to put more paramedics on Louisville's streets, Metro EMS started a program in July 2006 to give interested employees the opportunity to get the additional training required.

And this month Dustin Morganett, who has worked as an emergency medical technician in Louisville for the past eight years, became the first student to receive his paramedic certification.

"It shows an enormous amount of dedication," said Dr. Neal Richmond, director of Metro EMS.

Seven other students remain of the 27 who started the program. They are in various stages of completing required ride time, during which they observe and practice the things they have learned.

Richmond said having all eight students working as paramedics will help provide better service for the community and address a shortage of paramedics in the city.

Capt. David Martin, lead instructor for the class, said it's common to have such a high dropout rate because of the difficulty of the academic work involved.

Morganett, 26, said seeing the additional care paramedics can give patients — such as administering fluids and medications intravenously — motivated him to seek the extra training. "After you've been doing the EMT role for a few years, you kind of get your feet wet," Morganett said.

When Metro EMS announced it was starting the program, which allowed employees to take paramedic courses for free, Morganett seized the opportunity.

While students continue to work their regular jobs, their shifts are scheduled to fit around class times. And each month 20 hours of class time is considered paid work time.

Without that, Morganett said, he doesn't think he'd have been able to get the certification — especially with a young son at home.

"It's hard enough even if you're not working," he said. "It would be almost impossible. You'd never see your family."

To participate, Morganett had to agree to work at least two years with Metro EMS as a paramedic. But he said he plans to finish his career in Louisville.

Martin said it has been "invaluable" to the service to teach existing employees because it provides continuity in training. Employees go through the program with the same instructors and then do their clinical and ride-along time with people they will continue to work with after they are certified.

"There's a lot to be said for growing your own," Richmond said. Metro EMS will continue to offer the course, though a start date has not yet been set for the coming year.

As part of the program, EMS partnered with Spalding University, which offers a paramedic associate's degree.

None of the students have completed the course work for that degree. But Morganett said he plans to continue courses at Spalding when he finishes his probationary time on the street.

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