

Looking to hire

■ *EMS, health department have both experienced recent turnover*

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STANTON — Montcalm County Emergency Medical Services (EMS) and the Mid-Michigan District Health Department (MMDHD) are both looking to hire after some recent turnover.

Commissioners on the county's Health & Human Services Committee heard updates April 10 from EMS Director David Feldpausch about why paramedics are in such high demand, and from MMDHD Health Officer Marcus Cheatham, who explained why routine restaurant inspections are being eliminated for the time being.

EMS TURNOVER

Feldpausch began noticing an upswing in the demand for ambulance services last autumn. The trend continued through the winter to the point where Feldpausch knew EMS would struggle to meet response time standards.

Two EMS employees recently retired with one more planning to retire soon, while two full-time paramedics were recently reduced to part-time status at their request to meet family obligations and two more paramedics are leaving to pursue other careers.

"Turnover is nothing new for us as EMS tends to be a stepping stone in a career for many employees," Feldpausch told The Daily News. "It has been increasingly difficult to recruit qualified applicants and we have expanded our recruitment technique statewide and expect that we will need to expand them even more in their near future. The greatest challenge is the lack of programs to train new paramedics. With recent changes in state requirements to host a program, the number of programs has declined drastically. It is anticipated that Michigan will only produce around 250 paramedics statewide this year."

The county's Economic Development & Physical Resources Committee approved allowing Feldpausch to hire up to four full-time employees. Feldpausch said due to high demand nationwide, he will get one new paramedic per year, if he's lucky.

"We have basically held our own in recruiting for the past several years and continue to yet today while many services have struggled," he said. "We are at a point where we need to do more than hold our own, and expansion will be a challenge not only to achieve but to maintain in a fiercely

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competitive market for paramedics. While the market for paramedics is extremely competitive, it is held in check by modest insurance reimbursement rates ... so there is very little option for significant pay increases in the EMS field overall. This also makes it difficult for EMS as an occupation to compete with many other health care careers that are able to get much better reimbursements.”

MMDHD TURNOVER

The health department, which encompasses Clinton, Gratiot and Montcalm counties, recently lost two employees from its Montcalm County sanitation division — Elizabeth Kalnins and Chloe Morey.

“They were poached from us by the (Michigan) DEQ (Department of Environmental Quality,” Cheatham said. “They both said they weren’t considering leaving Montcalm County, but when they saw the fancy offices and the better pay, they went.

“This has been a real blow to us,” he said. “Basically they (the DEQ) cleaned out the Montcalm County branch of sanitarians.”

The health department on Wednesday offered the open positions to Paul Klein and Cameron Tinwalde and they

accepted. They will start their new jobs on May 15, but will require in-depth training.

Morey also worked as the health department’s resource recovery coordinator, overseeing recycling programs for Montcalm County. Cheatham said Lonnie Smith will cover that program until a new employee can be trained to take over.

In the meantime, the health department is eliminating routine restaurant inspections as a result of not being fully staffed.

“We are interviewing people to fill the vacant positions, but it will take a long time to get them trained,” Cheatham told The Daily News. “We are continuing to do plan reviews so new restaurants can open or existing establishments can modify their setups. In the short run, we will hire a contractor who can help us with restaurant inspections, but we will get behind schedule, we know that.”

Cheatham said health department officials plan to meet with Michigan Department of Agriculture officials this week to discuss the situation.

“I am fairly confident that by the end of the summer we will be through this,” he told commissioners.

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