

[Close-Up: Mike Murphy](#)

AMR uses technology to provide higher level of service

By HEATHER CHAMBERS

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It was the 1970s medical drama "Emergency!" that caught the attention of an adolescent Mike Murphy, who said the show's fast-paced life-threatening scenarios were just what he had in mind for his future career.

"It was something I was very interested in at a young age -- the adrenaline and the feeling of helping people," he said.

Murphy, general manager of San Diego ambulance provider **American Medical Response** and an employee of almost 30 years, began his career as an emergency medical technician while finishing his senior year of high school.

"I had a 48-hour shift that began Friday at 6 p.m. and got off Sunday at 6 p.m.," he said. "I'd go back to school on Monday."

Today, Murphy leads a team of 350 people, including about 120 paramedics and 130 EMTs, who provide emergency medical support in the areas of South Bay, National City and rural parts of East County.

Murphy plays a key role in administering seven performance-based contracts in 10 cities. Under his direction, AMR's San Diego division was awarded the California Award for Performance Excellence in March 2005.

A three-person team comprised of one of AMR's paramedics gained national attention earlier this year when it brought home gold medals in the National EMS Games. The team reportedly shocked its competition in the preliminary round, beating out last year's reigning New York City Fire Department.

The team will represent the United States at the international EMS Games in Australia later this year.

But AMR, which has been accused by its employees of unfair billing practices in other cities, has also made headlines in San Diego for employee unrest.

In February, a group of paramedics and emergency medical technicians picketed AMR's Balboa Avenue headquarters in demand of higher compensation and better health care coverage.

Murphy said those concerns have subsided since the employees found new union representation in National Emergency Medical Services Association, or NEMSA. Contract negotiations were scheduled between the two parties for June 14 and 15.

"I expect a good solid negotiation with employees and the labor union, and to come to a good, fair and timely resolution," he said.

Besides internal issues, Murphy said there are challenges facing the industry as a whole -- namely Medi-Cal and Medicare reimbursement and a diminishing number of emergency room beds.

"The county has done a fantastic job in terms of mitigating those issues, but when you look up and down the state of California there are less and less hospitals available to take care of the patients," Murphy said. "It backs up the system in terms of having our units wait for longer periods of time at hospital."

Murphy said those issues have created challenges for the emergency medical provider striving to provide higher levels of service.

But efforts to lessen lag times in other areas, such as the transfer of medical records, have made strides, he said.

The ambulance company initiated a pilot program in National City to better capture patient data in real time using handheld devices that transmit information electronically between first responders, ambulance providers and insurance companies.

"It's more of a continuum of care from the first time a patient is seen by the fire department all way down to the delivery of a patient to a hospital room," Murphy said.

AMR also recently invested \$50,000 in a simulation mannequin its employees nicknamed Tim, an acronym for Training in Motion, which serves as a mobile training tool capable of mimicking real-life scenarios.

Tim is hooked up to a software system capable of running preprogrammed and custom test scenarios. Medics respond to his various illnesses by administering the proper treatment based on his vital signs.

Teamwork, a vital part of the industry, has also played a role in Murphy's job satisfaction, he said.

"It's something that gets in your blood and, 30 years later, I'm still here and taking care of those who take care of others," he said.

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Business Description: American Medical Response Inc. is America's leading provider of medical transportation, transporting nearly 4 million patients nationwide each year in emergency, critical and non-emergency situations. Headquartered in Greenwood Village, Colo., AMR is locally operated in 36 states and the District of Columbia, with a staff of more than 17,000 paramedics, EMTs and other professionals operating a fleet of approximately 4,000 vehicles.

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