

Wheeler Healers

by Dave Lindsay

Broward Sheriffs Office (FL), Fire-Rescue Division

“Bike 10 responding.” That dispatch is heard 8-10 times a day from Broward Sheriffs Office, Fire Rescue Division’s newest medical unit.

On November 14, 2005, BSOFR initiated a pilot program, putting the division’s Advanced Medical Bike Unit (AMBU) in the terminals of Ft. Lauderdale/Hollywood International Airport (FLL). This program was to be introduced during the holiday season at one of the busiest airports in the country. As one of the first departments in the U.S. to put ALS bike medics in an airport, we needed to see if it was feasible and cost-effective before implementing it on a full-time basis.

The AMBU team was formed in 1999 to supplement EMS coverage at large scale events. As a fully functional ALS unit, we carry all the standard ALS equipment, including O₂, drugs, SAO₂, advanced airway adjuncts and an AED. We work in teams of two and carry our gear on two specially outfitted mountain bikes. We are deployed throughout Broward County at such events as July 4th celebrations, road races, festivals, and the Ft. Lauderdale Air and Sea Show as well as politically-charged events, like the OAS meeting, which draw thousands of demonstrators. The teams worked well at these events but FLL would require a totally different deployment.

FLL Station 10 Crash Fire Rescue has one BLS engine, one ALS Transport Rescue, BC, and four crash trucks. The call volume has doubled in the last couple of years and the major airport expansion has caused visitor traffic to almost triple, with continued growth expected. Because Station 10 is located in the middle of the airfield and R10 is occasionally detained by air traffic while en route to the terminal, response times are sometimes delayed. In addition, R10 is currently the only transport unit available on the airport property. When they transport, E10 is dispatched to the next call along with a mutual aid rescue, either R6 from Port Everglades or R32 from west of the airport. Both units often experience delayed response times due to traffic flow and access concerns. We began exploring ways to station an ALS unit in the terminals, and it seemed that AMBU would fit the bill. We could reduce response/patient contact times as well as canceling the rescue unit if no transport was needed, thus keeping them available for another call. More importantly, if R10 was transporting, we could deliver ALS care long before the mutual aide rescue unit arrived.

FLL has four terminals and a car rental center, as well as numerous parking garages. We were stationed in the baggage claim area of Terminal 4 and responded to all incidents in the terminals/jet ways/baggage claim area/parking garages as well as the surrounding curbside roadways. Because we are cross-trained as firefighters, we also responded to all fire alarms and fire investigation calls (but not alerts or fuel spills). We could advise for the first due in engine and assist with evacuations if needed. After the Chaulks seaplane went down in Miami, our bike medics assisted the aviation division in helping grieving family members and staff deal with the tragedy.

We worked seven days a week, including holidays. Our 12-hour shifts ran 9am-9pm, encompassing the heaviest visitor load and call volume. We had unlimited access to all areas of the airport. We could breeze through the check points, up the escalators and through the crowds more easily and quickly than three medics pushing a stretcher. The parking garages have always posed problems for the transporting unit, but the bikes could enter the garages from any level and access the different areas via the moving walkways/elevators/escalators or ramps.

During the trial period of November 14 through December 5, BK10 ran 236 alarms with an average response time of 2.50 minutes. R10, the airport rescue, had an average response time of 4.37 minutes. Thirty percent of the alarms at FLL were handled by mutual aid rescues with an average response time of 9.0 minutes. During that time the unit handled four cardiac arrests, a critical head injury to a deputy who was hit by a car while directing traffic, numerous falls from the escalators, as well as the medical/trauma calls common to the urban setting.

In addition to the operational benefits, AMBU also acted as an ambassador for the Ft. Lauderdale area and specifically the Broward Sheriffs Office Fire Rescue Division. The majority of our days were spent answering questions, giving directions and assisting visitors. One of our crews actually assisted a passenger in finding her car in the parking garage when she couldn't remember where she parked it.

Another important role that we played was being highly visible. Even though deputies and TSA agents are assigned to the checkpoints and gates, two uniformed medics on bikes riding the terminals acted as a deterrent to crime as well as provided two more sets of eyes to be on the alert for suspicious incidents and activity.

AMBU currently consists of 70 paramedics, 30 of whom have the credentials and clearance to work the airport. Most also have ARFF training. All members must complete an in-house training program geared after IPMBA's EMS Cyclist curriculum (*Ed's note: the author of this article has plans to attend the IPMBA Instructor Course in 2006.*) Additional training takes place on site at the airport.

This program was a huge success and is in the process of expanding to 24-hour unit, with peak times being spent on the bikes in the terminals and down times being spent on a second ALS transport truck stationed at Station 10.

Virtually every medic who worked BK10 demonstrated the highest level of professionalism and was very enthusiastic about the program. The Broward County Aviation Division, the Sheriffs Office Department of Law Enforcement, TSA and as well as all the airline representatives were grateful to us for being on site and viewed our unit as a definite asset to residents of and visitors to the Broward County/Ft. Lauderdale area.

Many thanks to Sheriff Ken Jenne and Fire Chief Chuck Lanza for their insight and intuitiveness to see the advantages of this program, as well as Assistant Chief Rusty Sievers and his command staff at Station 10 for their invaluable assistance in setting up this program and getting it rolling.

As one medic was heard saying, "where else in Florida can you go and ride your bike, in the air conditioning, in a pair of shorts, and get paid for it?"

For more information about the AMBU program, please contact me at David_Lindsay@sheriff.org or Chief Joe Hosford at Joseph_Hosford@sheriff.org.

Dave is a lieutenant with Broward Sheriff Office, Fire Rescue Division, and has 21 years on the job as a paramedic/firefighter. He has been an active member and Bike Team Coordinator since 1999. He is looking forward to attending the IPMBA Instructor Course sometime this year.

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