



The Over-65 Year History of Wood's Ambulance

In the early 1950s, Raymond F. Wood operated a car dealership on Summer Street in Gardner selling Chryslers, Plymouths, Desoto's and John Deere Tractors. Ray Wood was a civic leader...and on the Board of Directors of Henry Heywood Memorial Hospital. (At that time all emergency transport was handled directly by the Hospital.)

In 1954, the trustees of Heywood Hospital decided to divest themselves of all ambulance operations and focus on improving and expanding the Hospital to better serve the people of Gardner and surrounding towns.

On June 13, 1954, Raymond purchased the Hospital's ambulance, a 1942 Chevrolet wagon, for the sum of \$100.00 and Wood's Ambulance was born. Shortly thereafter the fleet was expanded to include a 1948 Cadillac. The business was run out of Wood's home on Montvale Road where the young company's two ambulances were garaged. The ambulance crews consisted of garage employees from the dealership and part-time firefighters.

In 1973, Ray Wood died and the operation was run by his wife, Alma Wood until 1984. Then, her son Jim Wood took over full operation of the service. Jim and his wife, Linda purchased the company from Alma in 1992.

In the early days of Wood's Ambulance Service there were no state or federal guidelines for ambulance companies. The only requirement was a basic first aid course consisting of several hours of instruction and a driver's license. It was not until 1964 that CPR training was instituted, and not until 1967 that the state and federal government began developing formal "Emergency Medical Technician" (EMT) training. By 1975 all ambulance services in the state were required to operate with at least two EMTs and patient care shifted from grabbing the patient and driving to the hospital to providing basic stabilization on scene prior to

transport. Jim Wood was in the first class taught in Gardner. This course was only the second class taught in the entire region.

By 1976, Wood's Ambulance was incorporated in the state of Massachusetts and consisted of about 25 employees.

By the 1980s the company had fully upgraded to the newer van style of ambulance and added on a third rig. In 1984, the car dealership was closed and one of the ambulances was moved to quarters on Summer Street, adjacent to the companies billing and administrative offices on Chelsea Street.

EMT training was expanding with new, more advanced, levels and Wood's Ambulance expanded to meet the changing face of pre-hospital care by adding "EMT-Intermediates" to their staff in 1987. The state allowed EMT intermediates to perform additional skills such as advanced airway management and intravenous access.

In 1994 the company expanded its role in pre-hospital care to include Paramedics. Paramedic level care is the highest level of pre-hospital care currently available. Paramedics are certified to administer medications, perform highly advanced airway management, emergency intervention, monitor and interpret electrocardiograms and manually perform defibrillation.

By 1990, Wood's Ambulance expanded into the Athol area and added two additional ambulances bringing the total to five. All operations were then moved to the Summer/Chelsea Street quarters with additional quarters in the Athol area. The company had grown from a small part time operation to a base of about 35 full and part-time employees.

Wood's Ambulance continues to grow, 1996 brought the 6th ambulance to the service and the number of employees to 65. February of 1996 the company purchased the former Newcomb and Walsh building on Main St. We moved into these quarters in September of 1996. Our new facility offers expanded space for training, billing, dispatch and crew operation. We have also expanded our scope of operation to include community-based functions such as CPR classes and we offer advanced EMT and Paramedic continuing education to surrounding EMS systems.

Today, we employ 75 people, many from Gardner and surrounding communities. Wood's is celebrating our 67th consecutive year in business in 2021.