

MEMORANDUM

TO: Community and Health Services Committee Members

FROM: Adelina Urbanski, Commissioner of Community and Health Services

DATE: June 20, 2012

RE: **Deputation on Donation of Decommissioned Ambulance to
High Adventure Gospel Communication Ministries**

As a representative of High Adventure Gospel Communication Ministries, Richard Mewhinney has requested to make a deputation to Community and Health Services Committee members to thank York Region for its donation of a decommissioned ambulance and to provide an update on its delivery to their medical centre project in Uganda.

In June 2011, Regional Council approved the request to donate one of York Region's decommissioned Emergency Medical Services ambulances to High Adventure Gospel Communication Ministries for a medical centre project in Uganda.

High Adventure Gospel Communication Ministries is a registered-non governmental organization that met all of the requirements in the Region's guidelines for the donation of decommissioned surplus ambulances.

These guidelines and the procedures for evaluating decommissioned ambulance requests were adopted by Regional Council earlier in 2011 through Clause 6 of Report No. 2 of the Community and Health Services Committee.

The decommissioned ambulance became the second ambulance used to support a 40 to 60 bed medical centre that provides maternal, paediatric and general surgical care in Ongutoi, Uganda. The attached newspaper article, "*York retired ambulances go abroad*" provides additional information.

The donation of York Region's decommissioned Emergency Medical Services ambulances to registered not-for-profit, community service and humanitarian organizations, such as the High Adventure Gospel Communication Ministries, supports international relief efforts and local community agencies.

Adelina Urbanski
Commissioner of Community and Health Services

York retired ambulances go abroad

By David Fleischer
May 16, 2012

When they're finally done their job here, some of York Region's most hard-working lifesavers travel far and wide, continuing to make a difference.

It's nearly impossible to imagine the impact a single, aging ambulance donated by York Region has made on the rural east Ugandan community of Ongutoi, Newmarket's Richard Mewhinney said.

Through his work with the Rotary Club, he helped High Adventures Ministries secure an ambulance the region was set to retire. The non-profit groups paid to bring it on a long journey to Ongutoi where, within 24 hours, it was transporting critically ill patients.

"The things we take for granted here simply don't exist in that environment, so it's hard to describe the impact," said Mr. Mewhinney, who was on hand to meet villagers and Ugandan cabinet ministers when the ambulance arrived in February.

"Celebration" is the word he used to describe what it was like.

Thanks to the now-infamous warlord Joseph Kony, Ongutoi is home to a population displaced from elsewhere in the region.

There are fewer than 50,000 people in the village, but it's part of the larger Amuria region, which is home to 300,000; a population suffering with twice the national average rate of HIV.

The village is 90 minutes from Amuria's hospital and "the roads are interesting at best", Mr. Mewhinney said. Mr. Mewhinney hopes to soon return to the region to visit a new medical centre that includes a nearly active operating room and a health education centre.

Getting ahold of an ambulance would be nothing less than a miracle for Richmond Hill's Harry Harakh.

Though it has already been approved at the committee level, Mr. Harakh doesn't want to jinx anything, pending a council meeting when he'll find out if he'll take charge of a pair of ambulances destined for the Guyana Burn and Health Care Foundation.

"I believe the ambulances will help the country in a big way," he said. "I believe it will make a tremendous difference in saving lives."

The native Guyanese first saw the need when he visited a hospital in the capital, Georgetown, and saw the old burn ward filled with furniture while patients suffered in an open room.

He secured 3,500 square feet of space and, using his local connections, got the hospital proper equipment and training from Sunnybrook Hospital's renowned experts.

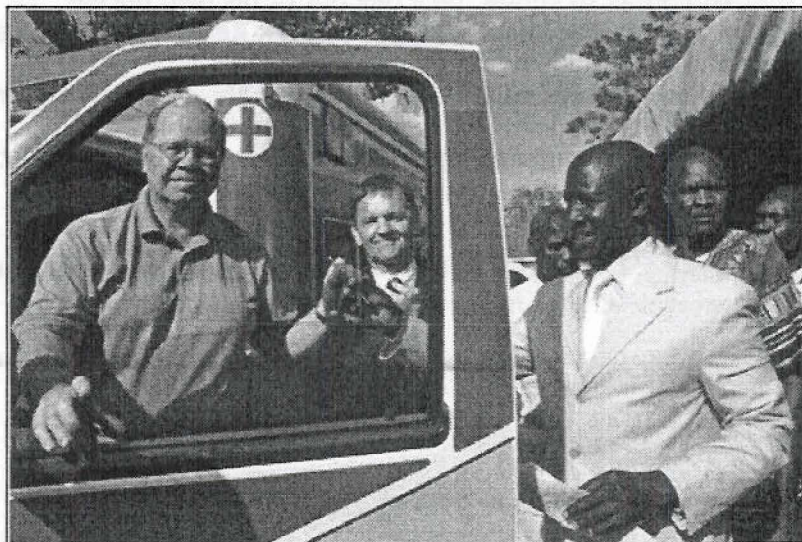
Today, the survival rate for burn victims has improved by 40 per cent and people are released from hospital sooner.

On another visit to the South American country, Mr. Harakh saw an ambulance arrive: a retrofitted mini-bus with the seats removed and the stretchers tied to the floor with rope.

The need for something better was immediately apparent.

York's donations come via a regional policy regarding how to dispose of ambulances that reach an age of about six years, or 250,000 kilometres.

Up to 25 per cent of the surplus vehicles can be donated each year, with priority given to local or regional uses



Ambulance donation. Newmarket Rotarian Richard Mewhinney gives the keys of an ambulance donated by York Region to Musa Ecweru in Uganda as High Adventure Gospel Communications president Don McLaughlin looks on. *PHOTO COURTESY OF RICHARD MEWHINNEY*

or international relief organizations.

A total of 11 ambulances are coming off the line in 2012, so up to three can be donated. The rest will be sold at auction, where they can fetch up to \$5,000.

Like Mr. Mewhinney's group, Mr. Harakh's organization is responsible for the potentially daunting costs of moving and maintaining the vehicle, but he takes heart from prior experiences.

A fundraiser for the burn centre produced \$300,000 in one night and when a disability bus was donated, he had private individuals and groups, such as the Rotary Club, chip in everything from shipping to maintenance and insurance costs.

"I think the generosity of spirit is uniquely Canadian," Mr. Harakh said.

If push comes to shove, he'll pay out of his own pocket.

Beyond the many miles it logged in York Region, the Ugandan ambulance was driven to Halifax, then from Mombassa to its new home.

It's hard to estimate its lifespan, but Mr. Mewhinney is optimistic about the prognosis and knows of one other ambulance that's survived three years and counting.

Asked if he can quantify the difference it's making, the most accurate assessment he can muster is, "The impact is exponential."

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Ambulance donation. Newmarket Rotary Club's Richard Mewhinney gives the keys of an ambulance donated by York Region to Miss Brown in Uganda as High Adventure Gospel Communications president Don McLaughlin looks on. PHOTO COURTESY OF RICHARD MEWHINNEY

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