

Lawyer and lifesaver: Attorney is also part-time paramedic

By Elizabeth Holland

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FILE PHOTO: Edwin "Ned" Fryer (right), and EMT Mike Bauman (left) treat St. Louis Police officer James Wood for a work related injury.
(Huy Richard Mach/P-D)

Edwin "Ned" Fryer is a lawyer - and a partner in a major St. Louis firm, at that. But don't refer to him as an "ambulance chaser." He's no such thing.

"I'm an 'ambulance rider,'" quipped Fryer, 59.

Fryer, a partner with the Bryan Cave law firm for the past 24 years, is also a part-time paramedic with the St. Louis Fire Department. While he works full time during the week as an attorney specializing in health care, corporate governance and nonprofit organizations, he spends almost every weekend working as a paramedic assigned on an as-needed basis to engine houses throughout the city.

Not only does he forgo golf outings, football games and other typical weekend fare to administer CPR, intubate patients and the like, he also donates the money he makes as a paramedic to a Fire Department foundation.

"I've never seen anything like it," St. Louis Fire Chief Sherman George said. "He shows a sincere desire to save lives and help people. . . . I can't say enough about him."

Fryer's interest in emergency medicine began when he was in his late 20s, when he was asked as an American Red Cross board member to organize emergency medical services for the VP Fair, now known as Fair St. Louis. Although he lacked medical know-how, he thought it would be an interesting challenge.

For the first VP fair, he found himself driving a golf cart with a paramedic on board to help fairgoers suffering from heat exhaustion and other ailments. He did the same the next three fairs.

"I caught the bug," he said.

That bug led him in 1985 to take a course to become an emergency medical technician, allowing him to provide basic life support. Fryer used his EMT skills as a volunteer on city ambulances. For several years, he donated his time on evenings and weekends.

"I felt as though I was able to contribute something significant there because they're all so overworked," he said. "Another set of hands on an ambulance is helpful."

In the 1990s, he decided to take another step. For two years, he took night courses so he could become a paramedic, enabling him to provide advanced life support. Once he completed his course work in 2001, the Fire Department asked him to work part time.

Fryer, of Ladue, gladly accepted but decided he'd rather donate than cash his paychecks from the department. That led to the creation of the St. Louis Fire Department Lifesaving Foundation, a tax-exempt charitable foundation for which Fryer is the vice president and a member of the board of directors.

Fryer's earnings from his work as a paramedic go into the foundation, which is intended, among other things, to help fund equipment for the Fire Department and to buy items such as automated external defibrillators for use in city buildings, he said.

Even when Fryer is at his full-time job, he has a hand in emergency medicine.

About 20 years ago, he started an emergency medical program at the firm. Since then, he has been involved in outfitting Bryan Cave with three AEDs and in training employees to use them.

As for his personal life, his wife, Dolly Fryer, is an anesthesiologist who understands his passion for medicine. So, too, do the five kids - ages 34 to 14 - who make up their blended family, he said.

"They've been very supportive - but I don't have any other hobbies," Fryer explained. "I don't play golf, I don't get together at the club. . . . Really, all I do is practice law and work as a paramedic. That's enough.

"I work very hard both as a lawyer and as a paramedic, and I try to balance those two things."

Between emergency calls, firefighters and paramedics frequently hit up Fryer for legal advice. If he can answer their questions, he does. If not, he passes on the names of lawyers who can be of help. In any case, Fryer said he doesn't mind the queries.

"I'm glad to talk about it," he said.

As for how long he plans to keep working as a paramedic, Fryer said he'll do it as long as he's able.

"It's a physical job as well as an intellectually demanding job," he said. "We lift a lot of stretchers and a lot of patients, and it's challenging. I want to be sure that I don't outlive my usefulness here.

"But once you get this stuff in your blood, it's addictive, and the excitement is very much of a motivator. In comparison to the practice of law, where sometimes you don't really get to see the outcome of your work, as a paramedic I can see immediately how a patient has benefited by administering the appropriate medications.

"The honeymoon is not over with me."