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## Forks Township to donate \$17,500 to Suburban EMS

### Move ends financial difficulties over switching service.

By Christopher Baxter

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Fork Township supervisors will donate \$17,500 to Suburban Emergency Medical Services, marking the end of a financial mess that followed the collapse of the former Forks Township Emergency Squad.

"This is absolutely a total relief," said Supervisor Erik Chuss, chairman of the Public Safety Committee, after the board's bimonthly meeting. "We can put this whole thing behind us now."

Supervisors said the donation was a "good-faith" recognition of Suburban's services in 2006, when Forks EMS temporarily closed, as well as its continued cooperation this year as the township transitioned its ambulance services.

In the past, the township made an annual donation of \$20,000 to Forks EMS, the local ambulance provider. But the donation was not made in 2007 because of concerns that Forks EMS may go out of business. Forks EMS went out of business Oct. 16, after supervisors decided to name Suburban the community's sole ambulance provider.

Suburban received roughly \$2,500 from the township's reserve fund in November to cover unpaid bills, and will receive the remaining amount, \$17,500, as part of the agreement.

No donation was budgeted for next year. The donation comes as Forks Township officials weigh a roughly \$7.1 million budget for next year, which includes freezing \$345,000 worth of capital projects, cutting \$49,000 in spending and hiking taxes by 10 percent.

Supervisors voted in November to administer a reimbursement program for Forks EMS subscribers by using the \$20,000 reserve fund to buy equivalent subscriptions from Suburban. But Forks EMS refused to turn over a subscriber list to the township, making it difficult for officials to determine who deserved a refund.

Chuss estimated at the time that fewer than 100 residents would be eligible for reimbursement, which would have cost taxpayers a maximum of \$5,000.

With the donation agreement, Suburban will guarantee service for all subscribers and incur any associated costs.

Forks EMS said in November that they intended to repay all subscribers, though that pledge was contingent on the squad selling its building on Sullivan Trail. A deal is close to being finalized, said Michael Keifer, operations manager for Forks EMS.

In other business, the board voted 4-1 to use \$2,000 originally allotted for an employee Christmas party, which was canceled, as a donation to Safe Harbor Easton, a local homeless shelter. The organization provided help to 11 Forks residents this year.

Chuss cast the lone dissenting voice, arguing that the donation was inappropriate given the township's financial situation and budget cutbacks.

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