

Local & State

Orlando Sentinel
THURSDAY, JANUARY 10, 2013

Orlando's rescuers on 2 wheels



They hit the road. In (left) Jeff and Philip Hernandez, Orlando Fire Department paramedics, meet up in their bikes for the post-Club Good party Tuesday night in downtown Orlando. The city has 23 bike-riding medics, who have joined the more familiar police officers of the Orlando Police Department.

Bikes speed medical help

Medics on mountain bicycles can beat rescue trucks to the scene of emergencies downtown.

By MARK SCHIFF
Special to the Sentinel

As Orlando rings in a new year, the Fire Department's paramedics were patrolling downtown streets on two wheels.

While the Orlando Police Department's bicycle officers have become familiar sights, the city's 23-paramedic, bike-riding medics, has

been less visible.

The team's 10 Centennial mountain bikes weigh nearly 40 pounds and carry about 40 pounds of life-saving gear — defibrillators, oxygen, drugs and other equipment the medics would need to help victims of heart attacks or breathing trouble.

City officials say the two-person bike teams can navigate downtown's crowded and traffic-laden streets more quickly than three-person trucks.

"You can get through crowds, through the office buildings, up escalators — you go everywhere," Lt. Mark Amico said. Four pairs of medics, including Amico, were on duty Monday night and into the early hours of

2013.

The city launched the bike team on a trial basis last year. During that three-month test period, the team showed it could often reach emergency medical emergencies more efficiently than rescue trucks. Bike paramedics reached 80 percent of the emergencies in less than three minutes, and more than half had them on-site within 10 minutes of dispatch from the Fire Department's Station 3 downtown area. Bike teams also respond to the emergency scenes.

"It reduces response times, especially in the downtown area," Amico said. **PHOTO BY BOB BATES**

Pedal Power To Join Downtown Public Safety Programs For Immediate Release

Mayor Glenda E. Hood made an announcement tonight to make the Orlando Fire Department's bicycle paramedics a permanent part of the downtown public safety team after a temporary test proved successful. The bike team response times significantly reduced the time it usually takes a rescue unit to respond in heavy traffic.

MaryAlicia Johnson, spokeswoman for Orlando Mayor Glenda Hood says, "During events, it's a great way to get through crowds to reach people quickly."

The bike medics, who are equipped with advanced life support medical equipment, have proven their ability to reduce response times by almost half during peak heavy traffic times in downtown. Mayor Hood confirmed that she asked Fire Chief Charlie Walker to permanently assign the Orlando Fire Department bike team, to cover medical emergencies in the downtown area every Friday, Saturday and holiday night from 9:00 pm to 3:00 am.

Each Friday and Saturday night since June 9th, two bike medics have patrolled downtown covering more than 2/3 of the calls by themselves, increasing the availability and efficiency of emergency equipment for downtown visitors and citizens. The bike team also provides assistance during festivals, sporting events, and road races.