Acadian Serves St. James

In an unprecedented move to upgrade emergency medical service, the St. James Parish Council has entered into an agreement with Acadian Ambulance Service, Inc. that makes each resident of the parish a member of AASI.

Under a 20-month contract, St. James becomes the first parish in the state to finance the membership fee for all its citizens. Similar contracts have been signed with other sparsely populated parishes but with the total cost of such an operation financed partially through subscriptions. According to Acadian officials, no other contract parish to this point has seen fit to underwrite the entire program which was made possible in St. James through sales tax dollars and contributions of fixed cost items such as ambulances and substations.

Paul Keller, parish president, said the action is in keeping with the council’s plans to provide “big city services” despite the rural nature of the parish.

“We are extremely fortunate to have such service available to us,” Keller said. “Acadian is recognized nationwide for its superiority in the field of emergency medical care and transportation. We could not have duplicated the standard of excellence they have set in equipment, communications and training.”

In more populated parishes, the ambulance company operates on a highly successful subscription basis. However, in areas with limited population, the membership program is incapable of producing sufficient funding for the company’s full-scale operation.

Service began in St. James at 8 a.m. on January 1, with ambulances stationed in Lutcher and Vacherie. To reach the ambulance service, residents may dial 1-800-252-5522, or dial “operator” and ask for Acadian Ambulance.

Richard Zuschlag, secretary-treasurer of the ambulance service, commended the council for its community concern and the citizens for their support of a “progressive, modern government.”

“Because of the arrangement,” he said, “we will be able to provide the best emergency care and transportation to the hospital possible to every resident of the parish at no fee to them. Non-emergency transfers to locations other than a hospital will be provided at a cost of $10 per trip (one way). Residents leaving the parish will pay a member milage fee of $1.25 per mile from the parish line.”

Zuschlag said that contractual arrangements are a unique way for rural parishes to receive superior emergency medical service.

“The addition of St. James to our service area has heightened the interest of other river parishes, and we see the possibility of further growth in that area,” he said.