

A Career in EMS: On the Road and Providing a Helping Hand

Posted by [CSM Headline](#) On 10/22/2006

Forty-five-year-old Ginger Barnes' new career involves lifting 125 pounds on a regular basis, calculating medication dosages, and analyzing test results all while balancing in a moving ambulance. Barnes is an intermediate paramedic with Charles County Emergency Services, and will graduate from the College of Southern Maryland (CSM) January 18.

"I was working for Civista Medical Center in La Plata as the manager of their telecommunications department. I liked it but I wanted to be working hands-on, directly with patients," said Barnes, who not only received her associates in emergency medical service (EMS) but picked up her intermediate paramedic's license as well (she recently completed the test required to obtain full paramedic status).

"I had been volunteering as an EMT-B with the Mechanicsville rescue squad. Watching my superiors working, I realized I could probably do more for my patients as a paramedic. Several of the people I worked with in St. Mary's were either instructors in the CSM program or were working paramedics. They convinced me to go after my passion and become a paramedic. The St. Mary's Advanced Life Support unit even paid for a portion of my education," said Barnes.

"The CSM program is nice because as a working mother I couldn't drop everything to attend training. The ability to stretch out my education over the course of two years really made a huge difference. Plus, the program is really in-depth. You gain a deep understanding of diseases and how the symptoms of these diseases affect your patient. The focus of the program, to me at least, was on understanding your patient, their on-going health issues and how they are contributing to their current condition. I think learning how to assess your patient leads to more comprehensive and caring treatment. You are not just treating an injury; you are treating the whole person," said Barnes.

Barnes is ecstatic about her job with Charles County Emergency Services, "I love it. I have such a great sense of accomplishment. I like working in an emergency setting and getting to work with the patients directly rather than attending to administrative matters only," said Barnes.

Her children are another matter. The mother of girls ages 19 and 10 and twin 13-year-old boys said life at home has been interesting to say the least. "The kids are still adjusting to me being home so much. They were used to me juggling work and classes and getting home really late, but now I am on a steady schedule and they are expected to do their homework right away and keep their rooms clean. But they will get used to it," Barnes laughs.

Barnes, whose work schedule includes 24-hour shifts and volunteer activities with St. Mary's County EMS (where she has lived for 30 years) and the muscular dystrophy association, recommends people consider the time requirements of the EMS program. "The program requires a lot of time, effort and dedication but it is so worth it. The tri-counties are in desperate need of paramedics and emergency medical service professionals. It is a very rewarding career and you can leave at the end of nearly every shift and say, 'I really feel like I helped someone today'. And that is a great feeling," said Barnes.

Learn more about careers in emergency medical services and health care career related opportunities at CSM's Healthcare Careers Expo, part of Healthcare Awareness Month, 3-6 p.m., Oct. 25 at the College of Southern Maryland, Prince Frederick Campus, 115 Williams Road, Prince Frederick. Located in the lobby, the expo will feature various healthcare professionals and students providing career information, demonstrations,

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