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**Fire-Based Ambulance Service vs Hospital-Based Ambulance Service:
Safeguarding the Health of our Community**
by Virgil Boss, CEO of Teton Valley Health Care

The recent public statements by our County Fire Department endorsing an action to eliminate the currently operating Teton Valley Ambulance Service District were shocking to many of us.

Several years ago, residents voted to support a hospital-based ambulance service. Since that time, tax support has built an effective and experienced team of paramedics and EMTs who have worked closely with physicians and midlevel providers during pre-hospital and ER care. We've also implemented a patient transport service that has been professionally staffed, with appropriate State of Idaho pharmaceutical licensure for medication that might be required during transport to other facilities. Teton Valley Ambulance earned the highest certification possible for pre-hospital care by receiving Advanced Life Support designation by our state.

The rallying point for breaking a contractual agreement that allows Teton County Ambulance to provide this service until 2013 is based upon statements by our Fire Department that they can save hundreds of thousands of dollars in tax funding. Yet, our community has not seen budget numbers that can be adequately substantiated. Until our entire community is invited to the table and can be assured that budget savings can be validated by an actual staffing plan that shows adequate capacity for greatly increased services, this argument should be set aside.

Teton Valley Health Care will not engage in divisive, politically-charged arguments to retain Teton Valley Ambulance. We will, however, work to ensure that optimal patient care is the ultimate reason for any changes to the current structure of community emergency medical services. At this point, too many questions remain unanswered by our Fire Department. Details must be given about a plan for patient transport. Answers must satisfy doubts about overall responders' experience, communication during an emergency, capacity to cover multiple-occurring events (fire plus human injury plus a need to transport to another facility) and responsibility for billing, employee benefits and adequate volunteer management. Simple responses from our Fire Chief stating that these problems are non-issues should not be acceptable answers for our community, nor should canned research from our Fire Department's national union headquarters provide the basis for our rural community to make swift changes to the most crucial service offered by our County.

It's our mission to promote the health of our community. We are not opposed to improving the method by which pre-hospital and ER care is administered. We support thoughtful, fact-based discussion, collaboration, and adequate time to ensure that in the end, our community truly benefits from any changes. *****