

AFRICA IN AMERICA

Lawyer to World's First Black Volunteer Ambulance Corps, Bed-Stuy Vollies

Some people find it hard to understand why a Orthodox Jewish lady lawyer would be involved for over 20 years with a volunteer ambulance corps in Bed Stuy, Brooklyn. Bed Stuy is a predominantly African American, economically challenged neighborhood – a ghetto. "Isn't it kind of dangerous out there?" is the polite way they ask.

Archives <http://www.bsvac.org>

EMT Class Graduates

First EMT Class Graduates from the BSVAC Deborah Crawford EMS Academy

Brooklyn, New York, Sep 14, 2010. BSVAC congratulates the first class to graduate from its new Deborah Crawford EMS Academy. An overflow crowd cheered the graduates in a ceremony on the front lawn of the "White House" (BSVAC Headquarters) on Thurs, 12 Aug 2010. Among the distinguished guests and speakers were New York State Assemblymember Annette Robinson, Carlos Menchaca (from the office of Brooklyn Borough President Marty Markowitz, who gave each graduate a certificate), Carl Luciano (from the office of Councilmember Al Vann), Toya Williford (from Brooklyn Community Foundation), John Coombs (from the Vulcan Society), Bob Iovine (from New York State Department of Health), Dr St Louis (from Haitian American Doctors) and the Rev Carmichael (from the Church of Scientology). Words of inspiration for the graduates by REMSCO's Marie Diglio; these were read. The event was covered by New York City's television News 12.

The Deborah Crawford Award for outstanding dedication and commitment to excellence, was awarded by Deborah's son, Duvale Robinson, to EMT class graduate Eleonore Edmond. The class Salutarian was Rosemary Penalo and Valedictorian was BSVAC vice president **Tamsin Wolf, Esq.**

We congratulate graduating class members: Edwin Bolanos, Sharif Cargo, Janisha Crawley, Eleonore Edmond, Lisa Ellison, Tiesha Grant, Tasnim Jeffries, Terrin Lindsay, Ruben Martes, Brandon Mills, Jheri Nichols, Rosemary Penalo, Ayeesha Roberts, Javier Thomas and **Tamsin Wolf, Esq.** Special thanks to class teacher Paramedic Frank Baluch and the EMTs who volunteered their time in practical skills sessions.

The next step for our graduates will be the New York State practical and written EMT examinations.

NYDailyNews.com
DAILY NEWS

Tamsin Wolf

Overview Daily News Articles Photos

State stops Bed-Stuy Volunteer Ambulance Corps EMT classes - despite successes
Posted on 07/19/2009 00:26:47
Every one of its students passed the state emergency medical technician certification test - but officials are still standing in the way of the Bedford-Stuyvesant Volunteer Ambulance Corps' own EMT classes.[Read More](#)

Architect & construction companies come to aid of Bed-Stuy ambulance corps
Posted on 01/18/2009 04:14:26
James (Rocky) Robinson has always believed in his dreams. Now he also believes in miracles.[Read More](#)

Ambulance corps' new lot sits next to crumbling bldg.
Posted on 12/18/2008 09:51:48
The Bedford-Stuyvesant Volunteer Ambulance Corps is used to dealing with emergencies - but not like the one the corps is facing now.[Read More](#)

State officials slam brakes on Bedford-Stuyvesant Volunteer Ambulance Corps' EMT classes
Posted on 05/22/2009 07:01:22
State officials have slammed the brakes on the Bedford-Stuyvesant Volunteer Ambulance Corps' long-awaited Emergency Medical Technician classes.[Read More](#)

Bedford-Stuyvesant Volunteer Ambulance Corps gets approval to teach EMT courses
Posted on 5/13/2010 19:10
After more than a year of wrangling with the state, the rag-tag Bedford-Stuyvesant Volunteer Ambulance Corps (BSVAC) finally got a conditional okay to teach Emergency Medical Technician training courses in a curbside trailer.[Read More](#)



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Vice president of Bed Stuy Vollies
Certified EMT
23 years of volunteer legal and accounting service to Bed Stuy Vollies

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I usually laugh and reply, "Actually, I'm safer in Bed-Stuy than I am in Manhattan because BSVAC has trained thousands of community residents in resuscitation and first aid. If I need emergency medical care in Bed-Stuy, the chances are excellent that I'll get it quickly."

Of course, that is not what they're asking. They are asking why I seem to ignore the differences in race, ethnicity, economic status, religion and gender that are important to them. The answer is simple. BSVAC is a place where these differences are acknowledged, shared, embraced and celebrated – with compassion and lots of humor – but it is a place where ultimately these differences do not make any difference. I find that irresistible. And I'm not the only one. The warmth, acceptance and support that BSVAC offers is what brings youngsters from the neighborhood off the streets and into our programs. At BSVAC we are family.

I like to tell folks that I have 2 families. One is in Washington Heights and consists of my dear hus-

band Bob, my wonderful children, Shira and Yitzi, and our 2 cats. The other is BSVAC. My 2 families are not separate – my children are both youth members of BSVAC and BSVAC's Commander, James (Rocky) Robinson, is their godfather. My commit-

BEDFORD-STUYVESANT VOLUNTEER AMBULANCE CORPS

Saving lives today. . . . building lives for tomorrow.

First on the Scene

The Bedford-Stuyvesant Volunteer Ambulance Corps (BSVAC), the nation's first minority-run volunteer ambulance corps, was founded in 1988 by two EMS workers, Captain James "Rocky" Robinson and Specialist Joe Perez. The creation of BSVAC was their response to the crisis in emergency medical service that afflicts New York's minority communities.

As in other minority communities, many residents of Bed-Stuy do not have health insurance. As a result, they are less likely to visit the doctor's office for routine care or for treatment in the early stages of disease. At the same time, African-American men and women suffer disproportionately from high blood pressure, diabetes, kidney disease, heart attacks and strokes. These factors lead to a disproportionate number of emergency room visits -- 75% of all emergency medical calls in New York City come from minority neighborhoods.

In continuous operation since 1988, BSVAC is the busiest volunteer ambulance service for its size in the nation, answering over 100 calls per month.

Response Times Plummet

When BSVAC first began operations, the response time in Bed-Stuy for city ambulances averaged about **30 minutes**. BSVAC established a record-breaking ambulance service that currently responds to over 100 emergency calls a month with an average response time of **less than 4 minutes**. BSVAC also established a neighborhood first aid center and has worked to promote preventive health care in the community. BSVAC has lost count of the number of lives it has saved.

Training the Community

In addition to medical services, BSVAC has worked tirelessly to train the Bed-Stuy community. To date, over two thousand local residents have been trained through BSVAC as First Responders who can save lives in emergencies. BSVAC has also developed a remarkable Youth Corps program that provides CPR, first aid and basic emergency medical training to teens and young adults, preparing them for full-time employment in emergency medicine. A program for younger children, called the Trauma Troopers, has also been developed by BSVAC; it provides CPR and first aid training. In addition to medical training, these programs provide positive role models and social activities. To date, hundreds of young people have completed the program; almost 100 of the graduates have become EMTs or have otherwise pursued careers in medicine as nurse, physician's assistant, or doctor.

While based in Bed-Stuy, BSVAC has reached out to other minority communities, from Harlem to LA, providing emergency medical training and assistance in setting up programs. Closer to home, BSVAC responded to the first World Trade Center bombing in 1993; it also responded to the Queens air disaster and to the World Trade Center on 9/11, when BSVAC volleys saved a firefighter's life.

Commander Rocky Robinson: "Bed Stuy VOLLIES were the first health professionals on the ground in Haiti while everyone else was singing 'We Are The World'.

"We started Bedford Stuyvesant Volunteer Ambulance Association in 1988 on foot, carrying oxygen.

"Your donation pays to train EMTs, pay the light bill in our headquarters, help keep our ambulances running.

"All donations are recorded by Vice President Tamsin Wolfe Esq, and are tax-deductible.

"Donate in person at 727 Greene Street, Brooklyn, NY 11221; by mail, or online."



Above, Commander Robinson at work on his 70th birthday with his crew at Bed Stuy VOLLIES base; below, with Mrs Wolf's sons.



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ment to BSVAC, however, involves more than family. Full disclosure: I'm a volunteer junkie. It started when I was 13. Over the years I've volunteered at all sorts of places, including camps for developmentally delayed teens, rape crisis centers, organizations serving disabled children, a legal center for deaf and hard of hearing adults. I get high from helping others.

I explain it like that so people won't think I'm some kind of altruistic person who is making sacrifices all the time. On the contrary. When I'm helping someone I'm trying to use whatever abilities I've been given by the Almighty for the best purposes. This makes me feel good.

It also helps me keep things in perspective. As a Harvard Law School graduate working in the legal departments at Fortune 100 companies, I was surrounded by intrigues and politics at the office; people got very excited about money; co-workers trembled in fear and spoke of an "emergency" or a "crisis" when what they were facing was only a looming deadline or an irate manager.

At BSVAC the stakes are life and death; an emergency is something that stops a patient's heart or keeps a child from breathing; and the response is not to gripe or grovel but to act quickly and save lives.

In 1988 I was working at a Park Avenue law firm when 2 City EMTs, Rocky Robinson and Joe Perez,

**Medical Journal of
Therapeutics Africa**

**MJoTA Institute of
Medical Writing**

<http://www.MJoTA.org>
publisher@mjota.org
1-609-792-1571



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showed up at my office looking for a volunteer lawyer. Each carried several shopping bags full of pieces of paper. They explained that the response time for City ambulances in Bed-Stuy was so long that people were dying. So they had started a volunteer ambulance corps in Bed-Stuy and they wanted to "make it legit." They knew that paperwork would be required so they had saved every scrap of paper that came into their hands, including receipts for donuts and pencils. They called me "Ma'am." When they told me they had no ambulance and answered calls on foot, I was hooked. It was clear to me that they were taking a leap of faith and trusting they would be empowered to do what seemed impossible. I am tenacious by nature, so this was right up my alley. "I will do whatever I can to help you," I promised.

Well into my third decade at BSVAC, I am still deliv-



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Bed Stuy Vollies Commander Rocky Robinson was watching the images from Haiti the day the catastrophic earthquake killed 10% of the population, Jan 12, 2010. He immediately put out the call for first responders, and 4 days later had a team that was flown by Scientologists to Haiti.

MJoTA Publisher went with the third group, (below) and saw first-hand the power of first response and the hard work and dedication of the Bed Stuy Vollies.

MJoTA Publisher is very proud to be Lieutenant Dodgson in Bed Stuy Vollies.



ering on that pledge. Today BSVAC needs me more than ever. We are the busiest volunteer ambulance corps for our size in the nation, and we respond wherever there is need if we can. For example, within days after the devastating 2010 earthquake in Haiti, BSVAC was on the ground in Port-au-Prince, opening and cleaning the General Hospital, setting up triage and treating thousands of patients.

When Commander Robinson and I traveled to Haiti 3 months later to meet with government officials and discuss helping Haiti set up an emergency medical service, we were moved and humbled by how grateful the people were for what BSVAC had done. Back in Brooklyn we are now busy operating a full EMT training program at our EMS training academy and – as always – answering emergency calls and struggling to manage despite the continuous economic challenges we face.

From the beginning, Commander Robinson, who has African ancestry, pointed out that with Mr Perez being Latino, we were a rainbow coalition. And from its inception, BSVAC has been our nation's only ethnically inclusive volunteer ambulance corps. It is a great honor – and a tremendous amount of fun – for me to serve as BSVAC's volunteer General Counsel and Vice President.

At BSVAC I know that I am helping to make a difference – to save lives and grow heroes. So when people ask me why I go out to Bed-Stuy, my answer is, "I can't stay away."

By Tamsin Wolf Esq

As many as 500 health professionals lost their lives when this Port au Prince hospital building collapsed on Jan 12, 2010.

