

Air Evac Lifeteam, a regional success story

Company has grown greatly since 1985, representative tells Salem Chamber of Commerce

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SALEM — Becky Phillips of Air Evac Lifeteam (AEL) addressed the Salem Chamber of Commerce during its regular monthly meeting Thursday, briefing Chamber members on the company's impressive growth over the past since its inception in 1985.

Phillips, who serves as membership sales manager for Air Evac Lifeteam, noted that the company has grown from a fledgling enterprise in the southern Missouri town of West Plains to a company that presently impacts 26 states. According to the company's website, AEL today is the largest independently owned and operated air ambulance company in the United States.

"There were 12 individuals that got together, got their business plan together, put their money up front. In 1985, they opened the first medical helicopter that serviced that part of southern Missouri," she explained. "Fast forward to the year 2014. Air Evac Lifeteam has grown to 115 bases in 15 states."

Through the use of medical helicopters and fixed-wing airplanes, Phillips said, the company has made it possible to transport patients quickly and safely to the proper facilities.

"Our mission locally is to



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STILL GOING STRONG — Becky Phillips, membership sales manager for Air Evac Lifeteam, informed the Salem Chamber of Commerce Thursday about the company's growth since forming in 1985.

enhance our local hospitals and EMS [emergency medical services]. We do not take the place of what they do; we enhance what they do," she noted.

One way in which AEL enhances hospital services is through what the company calls "hospital-to-hospital transfers," in which a patient is transported to a Level I trauma center.

"If we have a burn patient today, we might go to Mercy in Creve Coeur [Mo.]; if we have a 14-year-old that has been hurt on an ATV, we might take them to Cardinal Glennon or St. Louis Children's Hospital," Phillips explained.

The company also conducts what are known as "scene

flights," in which a pilot lands directly at the scene of an accident and transports the patient away.

While the company has experienced tremendous growth over its nearly three-decade history, Phillips said that the involvement of AEL's members is still critical to its ongoing success. In turn, she noted, AEL works with its members' insurance companies to secure payment for those members who require an emergency transport.

"Membership has been the key to making this successful in rural America," she said. "To date, we have 1.3 million members throughout our system."

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