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Hollywood comes to Hudson

By Laura Sukowatey

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Randolph Mantooth is probably glad he got a haircut.

The (then) 20-year-old actor almost turned down the co-starring role of paramedic Johnny Gage on NBC's hit show "Emergency" because producers didn't like his long hair. Not only did the 1970s series launch Mantooth's career but it also benefited him and the country in more ways than he could have ever imagined.

At that time, paramedics were extremely rare. There were eight in Los Angeles and six in Seattle.

"Paramedic was a word that America had never even heard before," said Mantooth. "But thanks to 'Emergency', the genie was out of the bottle."

Financial reasons made many doctors and politicians not very keen on the idea of training and employing paramedics. But America watched the show and wanted to see more of them.

Eventually, they did. In that seven-year time frame, paramedics went from almost non-existent to being a profession that kept victims alive on their way to the hospital. That was about 30 years ago, and today they're still doing just that.

Mantooth said at first the show was just a job, but he soon realized it was educational and saving lives. All the actors in the show were required to take a paramedic course and learned how to do IVs and CPR. It paid off too — Mantooth once found himself at the scene of a car accident knowing how to help an injured woman.

Now for over 20 years Mantooth has been giving back to those who gave him a successful career.

In 1982 he was asked to give a speech in Galveston, Texas, to the fire department and EMS about the history of paramedics and what helped launch it. Since then, he has spoken at many conferences and events around the country.

"Before 'Emergency' I didn't know anything about it," said Mantooth. "But these [paramedics] are incredible people. They really do risk their lives — they put it all on the line."

While he's given numerous speeches, he said he's never really done on-camera work for the EMS — until now.

Last Friday (June 27) Mantooth spent the day in Hudson shooting a video for the St. Croix EMS and Rescue. It's intended to heighten awareness of emergency medical services provided to the Hudson area and will be made available to community organizations, new residents and governmental agencies. It is also expected to air on community television channels in the area.

Besides Mantooth's narration, the video will include members of the EMS speaking about its mission and services provided to the community.

"We started talking with Randy's office around the holidays," said Rick Wold, director of the project and a five-year veteran of St. Croix EMS.

Wold said it took some time to figure out the details for Mantooth's trip to Wisconsin, and for a while it didn't look promising. But eventually they were able to iron everything out.

While Mantooth said he's been "the face" of EMS awareness, he can't take all the credit. He greatly respects the doctors and creators of the show who had the courage to start the program, even with incredible opposition.

Still, Mantooth said he appreciates the recognition he's received and was very lucky to be chosen for the show.

“When people say ‘my life was changed because of the show you did’,” said Mantooh, “that’s the most gratifying.”

The on-camera and narration segments were part of the yearlong project being filmed by Studio One Teleproductions of Eau Claire for St. Croix EMS. The video is scheduled for completion by this fall. More information is available at <http://stcroixems.com> and <http://randymantooth.com>.

“He is very humble about his role,” said Wold. “Despite what he might say, he is a real hero for those of us in the profession who were inspired by “Emergency.” Today everyone benefits from the advanced life saving procedures provided by EMS across America.”