

Hatzolah Ashdod Preparing To Open

By F. BLUM

Residents of Ashdod are looking forward to the opening of Hatzolah in their city. Ashdod, home to 200,000 Jews, including *chareidim* from every circle, and many American *olim*, suffers from a lack of adequate emergency care. Hatzolah Ashdod will alleviate the problem. The organization is in its planning stages, and would like to begin operating shortly. People in Ashdod need Hatzolah desperately in order to save lives.

When a three year-old-boy was found unconscious in a half-filled bathtub, his mother called Magen Dovid Adom. The dispatcher beeped the paramedics. They were in their ambulances when the call came in, but it took ten minutes of agonizing traffic dodging to reach the child. He passed away later that week, just days after his *upsherin*.

Many people recall the wrenching wait for help. "We stood around and tried to comfort the mother, while the boy turned blue in her arms," said a neighbor. "Nobody was able to help."

Only four Magen David Adom ambulances serve Ashdod's 200,000 residents at any time. That's one ambulance to 50,000 people. The MDA paramedics are dedicated and capable, but they fight a tough race against time. They don't always win.

The first four minutes after a heart attack can determine the victim's fate. Choking victims, burn victims, and others must also get help immediately. But in Ashdod, the MDA ambulances are parked in a garage, and a 10- or 15-minute response time is not uncommon. It's too long for many.

Even non-life-threatening conditions can be worsened by delays. And long waits mean unbearable pain and suffering.

When an old man fell in the street, passerby were afraid to move him, fearing he had sustained a back or neck injury. He waited 15 minutes for an ambulance.

Last week's terror attacks commandeered all four MDA ambulances. Some of the wounded had to be taken to the hospital with ambulances from nearby cities, which arrived later. And the entire city was left without a single ambulance to cover in case of a medical emergency.

Ashdod has no hospital of its own. Patients are taken to hospitals about 20 minutes away. Each trip to the hospital leaves the city with one ambulance less, for at least an hour. Some incidents require more than one ambulance. Car accidents — frequent occurrences in *Eretz Yisrael* — can call all four into action at once, endangering the rest of the city.

Rabbi Michael Hacoheh Schwartz, an Ashdod resident, and Rabbi Avraham Mordechai Berkowitz have spent many months planning the opening of Hatzolah Ashdod. They are backed by all 20 *rabbonim* in Ashdod, and by *gedolei Yisrael* from around the world. The *rabbonim* have declared it "a matter of *pikuach nefesh* — of saving lives".

Rabbi Schwartz and Rabbi Berkowitz plan to have a Hatzolah member in every apartment complex in the city. That would put help within two minutes' distance of every Ashdod resident. The reduced response time, and the proliferation of trained individuals in the city, would save lives.

Seventy men have already begun training to become Hatzolah members. But Hatzolah Ashdod cannot open yet. They need to purchase equipment and ambulances. And they need to make sure that every member is proficient in treating any emergency.

Training and equipment are expensive. But they are necessary. And they cannot wait. *Rabbonim* urge the community to come forward, and help their brethren in Ashdod.

It costs \$1000 to train and equip one Hatzolah member. A defibrillator — a lifesaving emergency device for heart attack victims — is \$1800. Donors can sponsor these or other items, in honor or in memory of a loved one or send whatever is possible.

Tax-deductible contributions may be sent to Friends of Hatzolah Ashdod, 1271 45th Street, Brooklyn, NY 11219. For more information please call 917-903-9225, or 718-686-9066.