

Fleet Spotlight: Central Park Medical Unit (CPMU)

By Keith T. Kerman and Destiny Fierro



For this week's newsletter we are spotlighting the Central Park Medical Unit (CPMU). The CPMU started as a New York City bike patrol. It was a group of volunteer teenagers on bikes, patrolling the park with radios and first-aid kits.

The members of the group at the time were Dean Esserman, Jonathan Fram, John Schwartz, Michael Ussak, Arthur Funn, Dorothy Marks, Brian Donnelly, James Finley, Robert Glassbunn, Paul Saccento, Frederick H. Kingsbury III, and Rafael Castellanos, the President of CPMU.

The program was meant to keep teenagers off the streets by encouraging them to help Central Park through positive reinforcement. The group was funded by the Central Park Precinct Community Council.

If an incident occurred, such as an injury or a crime, they could use the radios to call 911. At the time, ambulances often took 45 minutes to an hour to reach someone in the park, sometimes even longer. For visitors experiencing serious injuries or life-threatening emergencies like heart attacks, the long wait for ambulance could mean permanent damage or in some cases death.

One of the members bought a used police van from the Central Park Precinct. It was purchased with funds from the founding volunteers. Later, a stretcher was added to the van to transport patients when city EMS was unavailable. In 1976, the Central Park Medical Rescue Squad purchased a heavily used 1972 Chevy Type II ambulance from Lenox Hill Hospital. This enabled CPMU to become a fully-fledged, transportable emergency medical unit. In 1979, the rescue squad incorporated as a not-for-profit corporation and was renamed the Central Park Medical Unit.

Today, the Central Park Medical Unit operates a fleet of four ambulances, an SUV, an ATV, and six medic bikes, enabling rapid response throughout Central Park. CPMU provides medical coverage for major park events, including large gatherings such as Philharmonic concerts. The organization is powered by approximately 150 dedicated volunteers committed to helping others.



CPMU never charges patients for care, and its members are not paid for their service. Although the cost of purchasing and maintaining an ambulance runs into hundreds of thousands of dollars, the CPMU continues to provide free emergency medical care to New Yorkers. The organization is not a government agency and is funded entirely through donations from individuals and businesses.

In addition to their everyday emergency care in Central Park, the Central Park Medical Unit has stepped up during some of New York City's most challenging disasters. Volunteers from CPMU responded in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, providing support and medical assistance as part of the enormous mobilization of emergency responders at Ground Zero and surrounding treatment areas. They have also been part of the city's response to other major crises, including Hurricane Sandy in 2012 and the COVID-19 pandemic, joining broader efforts to support communities in desperate need of medical care and emergency services.



NYC Parks and DCAS offer fuel support to CPMU, and we were pleased to extend our memorandum of agreement with them in March 2025. Fleet, garage space, and fuel are among the critical resources needed to keep this vital service going. Last year, CPMU celebrated its 50th anniversary of supporting New Yorkers.

The Central Park Medical Unit is a powerful example of a community-based organization that benefits the public and saves lives. As CPMU President Rafael noted, "In 2025, we treated five cardiac arrests in five months. We also save lives by administering Narcan to reverse drug overdoses. In cases of traumatic brain

injury, our rapid response and transport allow patients to reach the hospital quickly for CT scans and emergency surgery to reduce brain swelling — a process that can be lifesaving. These are just three examples, and there are many others.”

DCAS thanks CPMU and all of its volunteers for their service and commitment to NYC and Central Park and looks forward to growing our partnership together. Learn more about CPMU [here](#).



This show highlights vendors who support the New York City's Clean Fleet and Vision Zero initiatives, and daily operations. Vendors will offer a wide array of products to improve vehicle safety. The show will also highlight vehicles and equipment with alternative fuels and emissions-reducing technologies, along with the latest in light and heavy-duty vehicles, trucks, horticultural equipment, tools, fleet services, and more!

**Thursday,
May 21, 2026
9 a.m. - 2 p.m.**

Accessibility Questions?
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by May 6, 2025



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37th Annual Equipment & Vehicle Show Flushing Meadows Corona Park (by the Unisphere), Queens, NY





Let's Bring the Pressure Down: High blood pressure can put you at risk for heart disease and stroke, the leading causes of death in the United States.

WorkWell NYC's **8-week hypertension prevention program**, Let's Bring the Pressure Down supports city employees living with or at risk for high blood pressure. You'll learn:

- What causes high blood pressure and how it can affect your body
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- Self-care practices to manage your blood pressure and overall wellness

Register today to lock in your spot!

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NYC Fleet Newsletter 521, January 16, 2026: Fleet Safety Leader Nate Koszer Recognized with 100 Year Association Award

NYC Fleet Newsletter 520, January 9, 2026: Fleet Spotlight: Harry Febo, NYPD Fleet Mechanic

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