

When every second counts



Ron Rittenhouse/The Dominion Post photos

Len Hancock Jr. (left) shows how the Force 4 Rapid Responder works as Len Hancock Sr. (second from left), Linda Rudy, Chris DeBerry, Jack Rhoades and Mike Fortney look on.

Area businessmen make emergency response vehicle



Mike Fortney (from left) and Chris DeBerry, watch as Len Hancock Sr. operates the Jaws of Life.

By Brandy Brubaker
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When seconds count, the Force 4 Rapid Responder can make the difference, Len Hancock Jr. said.

Hancock, and his father, Leonard Hancock Sr., recently designed and built the Rapid Responder — a light-duty, high-powered rescue vehicle — in the garage of their longtime family business L.H. Jones, on Earl L. Core Road.

The Rapid Responder has a special hydraulic design that allows it to run rescue tools — like the Jaws of Life —

quicker, stronger and more efficiently than other rescue vehicles, Hancock Sr. said.



Mike Fortney, of Mon EMS, said the Rapid Responder could reduce a typical 15-minute door-removal extrication by anywhere from five to eight minutes. During the “golden hour,” the 60 minutes a seriously injured patient has to get from the crash to the hospital to have the best chance of surviving, every second counts, Fortney said.

To the Hancocks, helping someone survive a crash is a special and important thing to do.

Hancock Sr.’s parents each died in separate vehicle crashes, in the days before Jaws of Life and other life-saving apparatuses.

Hancock Jr. said that stuck in his mind as they were designing the Rapid Responder.

“If we can give back one person their life to spend time with their grandkids, to put someone back with their children that makes all of this worth it,” Hancock Jr. said. “What wouldn’t you give to have those people back in your life?”

The Hancocks came up with the concept four years ago through work L.H. Jones does with Amkus Rescue Systems. They helped Amkus with The Ultimate, a heavy rescue vehicle, and thought how helpful it would be to emergency responders to have a vehicle with the same kind of power as The Ultimate in a smaller, more maneuverable and more affordable size.

The Amkus vehicle is 42 foot long and can cost between \$450,000 and \$700,000, Hancock Sr. said. It’s often used in large cities. The Hancocks’ Rapid Responder, built with a Ford F550 4x4 as a base, will cost between \$230,000 and \$250,000.

The Hancocks figure, at their current size and location, they can build seven to 10 a year. They hope to expand their new rescue vehicle business, which they named Life Force Rescue Systems.

The Rapid Responder has the capability to run up to four rescue tools at once, cutting down on the critical time it takes to switch tools. The tools also can be controlled on site with a remote control, rather than having to send someone back to the truck to change settings, Hancock Sr. said.

Other features include advanced lighting capabilities and an on-board compressed air foam system for putting out fuel or engine fires.

“This is a revolution,” Hancock Jr. said. “There’s nothing in existence like it in the world. It’s a game changer.”

Life Force is working with Mon EMS and Morgantown Fire Department on a possible partnership to test out the Rapid Responder once Life Force has completed its in-house testing.



Fortney said they'll be able to gather real life data, comparing similar old calls with new ones using the Rapid Responder.

Fortney said the new vehicle is a great value. Mon EMS currently has two rescue vehicles. The smaller one was built in 1996 and cost \$150,000. The larger one is from 1990 and cost \$350,000, Fortney said. Neither can do what the Rapid Responder can do, he said. "It is the one for all application," he said.

In addition to crash rescues, the Rapid Responder can be used for building collapse response, and fires. Using its ability to pump 450 gallons of water a minute, the Rapid Responder also can be used in natural disaster response.