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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE, December 1, 2006

**Acadian Ambulance will seek to serve Ouachita Parish
Rural substations and helicopter service included in parish response plans**



During the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, Air Med prepares to take off to pick up more patients at the stranded New Orleans hospitals.

Photographed by: Marc Creswell, Flight Paramedic

Acadian Ambulance Service, the nation's largest privately owned ambulance company, will bid on providing service to Ouachita Parish. Richard Zuschlag, Chairman and CEO of the Louisiana-based company, which also operates in Texas and Mississippi, made the announcement today. "We've been following the ambulance issue in Ouachita Parish closely," he said, "and we commend members of the Ouachita Council of Governments on developing a very comprehensive ordinance. The high standards it established will mean improved service to the people of Ouachita, regardless of which provider is selected. The commitment of OCOG to those high standards attracted Acadian to Ouachita Parish."

Operations Manager Josh Creed said if the company's bid is accepted, Acadian will bring a new multi-million dollar communications center to the parish. "Our current communications center has long been considered a model for the EMS industry," Creed said, "using GPS tracking of our fleet of ground and air ambulances to assure the quickest response times. The new facility would serve as a full-time dispatch center for Ouachita, and a back-up center for our facility in Lafayette."

Creed said the company's belief in rural substations housing ambulances and crews at strategic points in a service area forms the basis for deployment of resources. "The substations are important in maintaining rapid response times and in being contributing members of the communities we serve," he said. "Our years of experience show that the substations make for happier and more productive employees. Medics prefer working in the communities in which they live. The stations become second homes for them."

Acadian Vice-President of Operations Terry Arceneaux said Acadian will expand its Air Med division to establish helicopter ambulance service in Ouachita. "Ouachita Parish is the only major market in Louisiana without an air ambulance helicopter," he said. "Residents are missing a life-saving element of emergency medical service. With the addition of a helicopter ambulance in Ouachita, we would have seven helicopters in our Air Med fleet."

A traditional practice of Acadian over its 35 years of operation has been the hiring of local people when it begins service in a new market. "As an employee-owned company, we know our strength lies in the quality of care-givers we can attract and retain," Arceneaux said. "Typically, when we

move into a new area, local employees who join our staff do not experience a cut in pay. In fact, many actually enjoy a pay increase. Our goal will be to see that this holds true for Ouachita employees. We will extend seniority as it relates to pay and benefits and those new employees will have an opportunity to become employee-owners under Acadian's ESOP program.

Among the many honors it has received since it was established in 1971 in Lafayette, Louisiana, Acadian has twice been voted the best ambulance service in the nation by the Community Services Committee of the American Ambulance Association, and has received the U.S. Senate Innovation Award for being on the cutting edge of the EMS industry. Acadian is among 100 companies in the nation with a 3-year accreditation from the Commission on Accreditation of Ambulance Services. Acadian's use of highly advanced life-saving technology has been recognized by high-tech Guru Bill Gates of Microsoft and by the Smithsonian Institution.

Perhaps the greatest recognition received by the company was for its service during hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The most coveted honor in the emergency medical services field, the 2006 James O. Page Leadership Award was presented "collectively" to the company's employee-owners by JEMS, the Journal of Emergency Medical Services. A.J. Heightman, editor-in-chief of the magazine, said the award was "for their heroic efforts under some of the worst conditions in U.S. history."

Richard Zuschlag was honored as a runner-up for the 2006 Inc Magazine Entrepreneur of the Year Award for his leadership during the hurricane catastrophe.

President George W. Bush, in a recorded speech to Acadian's 2006 Paramedic Luncheon -- during which he introduced the principal speaker, former President George Herbert Bush -- called the men and women of Acadian "some of the most courageous, inventive, caring and determined people in the field of emergency medicine" for their efforts during the 2005 hurricanes. George H. Bush called the Acadian employee-owners "true heroes" and spoke of the "skill and sacrifice that went into saving so many lives and easing so much suffering."

A membership program will be offered, according to Creed, under which Medicare and Social Security recipients are relieved of co-insurance and deductible costs, while people with private insurance or no insurance coverage will receive a 20 percent discount on cost of services rendered.

Among other features of the service will be a direct one-button connection to the 911 emergency system. "Local medical societies will be involved in the establishment, enhancement and monitoring of medical protocols used by paramedics," Creed said. "We will arrange for a local physician to serve as medical director and liaison between medical societies and field operations."

The Acadian staff includes 2,289 employees serving LA, TX and MS in 36 parishes and counties. Medics operate from 106 stations utilizing 225 ground ambulances, six air ambulance helicopters, and five fixed-wing airplanes.

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