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## *Consider Yourself Incomplete*



**Name:** John R. Zaragoza

**Title:** Division Director- Department of Public Protection in the Division of Emergency Medical Services

In a world of constant transformation, change is inevitable. John R. “Z” Zaragoza, Director of EMS in the Department of Public Protection for Volusia County, Florida seems to be making the world a better place through his passion and dedication to the EMS world.

In his younger years, Zaragoza started his journey through the coal mining industry in order to make a living. Soon enough, the young, yearning individual found his calling through an unfortunate, catastrophic force of nature known as the Johnstown Flood.

At the time, Zaragoza worked as a part-time volunteer firefighter in Seward, Pennsylvania. The town had no EMS, and the closest ambulance was 4 miles away from accessibility. When the Johnstown Flood came in relentless, full force, there was no EMS to be found in sight. The lack of resources did not stop Zaragoza from evacuating the victims from the flood plane. His courageous efforts and determination to help the community changed his calling from firefighting to the EMS world.

Shortly after the flood, an ambulance was donated to the fire department through Catholic charities. The fire department passed the ambulance to the local ambulance service in town. John was the first person to be trained on the ambulance. He climbed the ladder of education and certification in EMT school, basic and advanced training as well as a three-week paramedic training in Wilksburg. He became the first of many achievements in his town by becoming the first paramedic.

Zaragoza says, “Once I was committed to the paramedic level, it was really what I wanted to do.” In 1982, he moved to Pittsburgh to pursue his career full-time.

Zaragoza's passion for education and keeping up with the changes of the EMS world did not negate his compassion for human connection. Zaragoza was on a call in the Mckees Rocks for an elderly woman being transported to the former St. Johns Hospital in the Northside. She spoke no English and seemed agitated to what was happening in her life. Chaos consumed her thoughts during her treatment on the way to the hospital. In that moment, John reached over to grab her hand and softly held it in order to calm her nerves. Suddenly, a dense fog was lifted and she was OK. Though she passed away at the hospital, in the moment, the simple compassion for another human gave her peace at the time.

The best advice John has for people starting out in their field is, "Never forget where you came from. Remember your background. People get caught up in technology and the chaos of the world, but sometimes the best care you can give to someone is holding their hand. It's a universal act of compassion."

John moved to Greenville, South Carolina in which he worked with a large group of professionals to move from traditional service to high performance modeling service. Zaragoza says, "Change is never easy to people but it was necessary for the goal and target in order to be more efficient. Working with people who are willing to change makes the world of difference."

Because of his background in high performance modeling, John moved to Daytona Beach, Florida in Volusia County in order to be the first outside director for the county. Zaragoza says, "The only thing that changed is the trees and the sand. It has become the same motivated people doing the right thing to be better."

The county receives 90,000 calls per year regarding emergency medical dispatches. The call volume is not going to slow down, so it's important to stay up-to-date with high performance modeling while staying innovative in order to work with the available resources at hand.

During his off days, John enjoys golfing with friends and collecting antique bottles to decorate his office. Because of his strong passion for the EMS world, he finds himself absorbed into his work, but actively partakes in motivational speaking.

Zaragoza says, "Consider yourself incomplete at all times. There is no pinnacle of education and experience, and you should always improve yourself to be ahead of the curve."

In a world of constant transformation, change is inevitable. People have to stay up-to-date to current trends and educational standards in order to uphold what's best for the proper care of the community. From climbing the ranks in the EMS world to educating multiple county's of high performance modeling service, John R. "Z" Zaragoza is a prime example of someone changing the world for the better.



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