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Paramedics give West Boca emergency room physician rare honor

By Patty Pensa | South Florida Sun-Sentinel
January 5, 2009

West Boca - With the fire trucks and a crowd of paramedics outside, Dr. George Blanton figured he stumbled into a disaster drill.

But the physician instead became the center of attention on a recent morning. The paramedics who know him best held a massive trophy — an ax with a golden head, mounted on wood — with Blanton's name on it.

Not just anyone can get this trophy. You have to be a retiring firefighter to earn the union honor. But paramedics rallied around Blanton, the revered doctor who has treated patients in the emergency department at [West Boca](#) Medical Center for more than 20 years.

Paramedics hatched the idea to thank him after the hospital contracted with a new physician group for the emergency department last year. Many feared Blanton would be let go. Even after Blanton was hired with the new group, ApolloMD, firefighters and paramedics still wanted to recognize him.

"I think everybody feels a sense of why he's a doctor: It's out of a sincere and intense conviction to help people," said Capt. Patrick Thume, of [Palm Beach County](#) Fire-Rescue. "The ax is basically a symbol of our unmitigated respect and admiration for him."

Blanton is hesitant to talk about himself, but eager to dive into the work of saving lives. He approaches patients with calm and taps into a reservoir of medical knowledge to treat them.

Blanton jokes that he has a black cloud over his head so when he's in the emergency department, patients keep piling up. Really, it's the adrenaline rush that drives the 61-year-old physician.

"I like the pace," he said. "Every day is different. Every hour is different. You never have a routine and you never know what fire-rescue is

going to bring in."

Most patients come in for shortness of breath, chest pain and stomach aches. But there are cases that stretch the imagination.

One memorable case was a man who was in a car accident. It didn't look like much was wrong. Blanton said, until he heard air blowing in his chest and saw the man's body blow up like a balloon. Blanton put in a chest tube and eventually the lung puncture healed on its own.

Paramedics use words such as legend, extraordinary and special to describe the doctor.

"We respect him so highly," said Lt. Jody Miedema, of [Palm Beach County](#) Fire-Rescue.

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Thume, the fire-rescue captain, said the respect comes from Blanton's relationship with paramedics. He understands it's difficult for paramedics to routinely see injured bodies and grieving relatives.

About 10 years ago, Thume responded to a young father who was bleeding from his mouth. Thume was shaken by the sight but Blanton was quick to offer reassurance.

"He was extremely compassionate and told me what a wonderful job I did," Thume said. "Our job is tough because sometimes there is never closure. He gives us that closure."

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