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## Colrain paramedic is 'Hometown Hero'

By DIANE BRONCACCIO  
Recorder Staff

COLRAIN — After a full day's work with the South County Emergency Medical Services, paramedic Gary Ponce of Colrain spends much of his spare time running the Colrain Volunteer Ambulance Association. "I'm an oddity," said Ponce, winner of a 2017 Hometown Hero award from the American Red Cross of Western Massachusetts. "Most people would want to run away from this job. People think I'm crazy to do this on my off-time."

"Until I came here," he said, gesturing at the ambulance service's modest office in the Colrain Fire Station. "I never volunteered for anything, unless I got paid for it."

Ponce is the only person from Franklin County to have won one of the seven "Hometown Hero" awards given out this year. He and the others will be honored at a March 17 awards reception in Springfield.

Since Ponce became the CEO/director of the Colrain Volunteer Ambulance Association (CVAA) in 2008, the volunteer ambulance service has broken records for never missing a call in a wide, sparsely populated rural region. So far, the volunteer ambulance association has responded to 1,861 calls out of 1,863.

"That's two calls we missed in

eight years," Ponce said.

The CVAA now serves about 2,600 residents in Colrain and Heath. It also provides primary paramedic intercept services for the Charlemont Volunteer Ambulance Association and mutual aid to other ambulance services in Franklin County.

**Gary Ponce is the only person from Franklin County to have won one of the seven awards given out this year.**

Ponce, who is from northern California, became an EMT (Emergency Medical Technician) in 1983, and then a paramedic in 1991. He moved to Massachusetts in 1996 after managing EMT/

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Colrain Ambulance Director/CEO Gary Ponce checks out equipment in the back of the ambulance. Ponce, a 34-year EMT, received a Hometown Hero award this year from the Red Cross of Western Massachusetts.

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