

Your life may be saved someday by what students are learning in Natomas High's newest Career Technical Education class.

Twelfth-graders are studying Emergency Medical Technician skills they can use to get a job responding to 9-1-1 calls about heart attacks, car crashes, violence, or any other kind of medical emergency.

When they turn 18, Nighthawks who pass the new class with flying colors can test for EMT certification leading to jobs in private ambulance companies, hospitals, fire departments or with other health-care providers.

"It will allow them to become employed in a profession they can feel good about and serve the community – this is a profession you can be proud of," said Cor Morton, a longtime paramedic who teaches the new class.

Morton said that expertise in emergency response can help Nighthawk students even if their goal is a career outside the health profession: What employer does not want lifesaving skills on his or her staff?

Students learn cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) to restore breathing and blood circulation. They learn how to use an Automated External Defibrillator (AED) for irregular heartbeat. They learn how to assess and stabilize patients in crisis, then safely load them onto gurneys for transport to a hospital.

Shelves in Natomas High's EMT are loaded with gloves, goggles, gauze, mask, stethoscopes, blood pressure cuffs and other medical equipment. An adjacent workroom contains mannequins, artificial ventilators, crutches, equipment for surgical spine immobilization, and other essentials for practicing hands-on skills.

"I want to be a surgeon. and taking this course in high school gives me an opportunity to be prepared to work with patients who have different types of symptoms and injuries," said India Pittman, 17, who added that earning an EMT certificate also could lead to a job and steady income while she's in medical school.

Alejandro Chamorro, 17, said the life-saving skills he's learning could be crucial regardless what career he ultimately enters. At any moment, a heart attack, seizure, or other medical emergency can strike a bystander. "In case I run into someone who needs help, I can use what I learned here," he said.

About 20 Nighthawks currently are enrolled in the year-long EMT program, which encompasses about 180 hours of classroom instruction, hands-on skills practice, and service as an ambulance intern.

The EMT course is strenuous and participants must have passed or currently be taking a course in Anatomy and Physiology, Morton said.

"These students are using the same textbook and learning the same skills with the exact same equipment and instruments that adult EMT students use," Morton said. "So nobody intended it to be easy. ... I think it's fun, but it's hard work."

Morton said he's not aware of EMT training offered at any other local high school in the region. The NHS program was created in collaboration with American River College. Thus far, most participating Nighthawks have done well, he said.

"They show up, they're here, they pay attention, they do the skills – so far, it's been a great response," Morton said.