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SPECIAL REPORT:
Marc Boies and other
Mercy Flight pilots are
seeing things more clearly. **20**

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proposal would aid
neighboring Wegmans. **3**



Goggles brighten skies for Mercy Flight pilots

BY TIFFANY MONDE
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Imagine driving down a country road on a dark night. The switch for your lights is stuck and you can't turn them on.

Now imagine pulling and pushing and twisting that switch until the jam breaks free.

Lights! Finally, you can see.

This is what Jeff Mendola compares to the difference between flying at night and flying with night vision.

Mercy Flight, which makes about 2,000 flights a year and 1,000 patient transports, has implemented night-vision goggles that make flying not only easier but safer.

Mendola, Mercy Flight's director of development and external affairs, said that before the use of such goggles, decisions on whether the helicopters could fly on rough-weather nights were based on a best estimation.

If pilots got in the air and found the weather was bad, they had to return.

Now the goggles provide a more accurate glimpse into the sky.

"There have been calls where there have been questions as to whether or not we could go," said Marc Boies, lead pilot and director of operations for Mercy Flight. "With the goggles, we knew we could."

In winter months the weather is more of an issue, but during the summer – Mercy Flight's busy season – fog is the main concern.

"It's literally like night and day. You can see the weather, places to land, hazards and even on-scene accidents. What normally you may not see until a mile away, you can now see 10 miles out," said Boies.

As a nonprofit, Mercy Flight had to raise

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money for the nine sets of goggles, which cost \$9,000 a pair, plus about \$100,000 for the training.

Mercy Flight has a budget of \$7 million.

The federal government hasn't yet mandated the use of night-vision technology, but Boies suspects that may change in coming years.

Implementing the use of goggles has been a multiyear process: It took about two years to get the necessary approvals, plus a year and a half to modify the helicopters.

Most of the pilots have flown crafts in the military using night vision, but all were required to go through two months of training with the new equipment. They have been fully operational for about a month.

"Between 30 to 40 percent (of calls) occur at night," Mendola said. "We can do more calls than before, and the primary goal is always safety."



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