

KEYSWEEKLY

TWO OF THREE TRAUMA STAR HELICOPTERS ARRIVE IN THE FLORIDA KEYS

By **Contributed** - August 28, 2025



A second helo touches down in Marathon on Aug. 26. The third Trauma Star helicopter is expected in the coming weeks. ALEX RICKERT/Keys Weekly

Monroe County Fire Rescue (MCFR) and the Monroe County Sheriff's Office (MCSO) took delivery of the first and second of three new Trauma Star air ambulances at the Marathon hangar on Aug. 25 and 26. The Trauma Star program is a partnership between the Monroe County Board of County Commissioners and MCSO. Trauma Star provides flights to mainland hospitals for critical patients in need of specialized care.

On average, Trauma Star provides nearly 1,400 flights annually, with three to four flights per day. According to Sheriff Rick Ramsay, Trauma Star is one of the five busiest air ambulance programs in the United States. The three new Leonardo AW139 twin-engine helicopters will replace the three helicopters in the fleet that are more than 20 years old and are no longer in production, making it difficult to find parts when needed.

"This state-of-the-art aircraft will serve as the flagship of our life-saving fleet and represents our continued commitment to safety, rapid medical care and protecting lives," said MCFR Chief R.L. Colina.

The new helicopter's range also enables emergency rescues in the Dry Tortugas, allowing flights to Miami's critical care centers without needing to refuel en route. Additionally, the capacity allows for two adult patients to be flown in one helicopter at a time, which cannot be achieved with the current aircraft.

The funding for the \$52 million purchase comes from the infrastructure penny sales tax, approved by a referendum. The infrastructure sales tax is paid by Monroe County residents and visitors when buying items, not through property taxes.

The second and third helicopters are expected to arrive in the coming weeks. The pilots and crew are continuing training, and the new helicopters are expected to be in service starting in October.

Monroe County Fire Rescue personnel get an up-close look at the interior of the new Trauma Star Leonardo AW139 helicopter. MARY MOELLER/Monroe County Fire Rescue

Monroe County Fire Rescue, Monroe County Sheriff's Office Colonel Chad Scibilia and the MCSO aviation department, along with the Trauma Star flight crew, were in attendance

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The first of three Leonardo Trauma Star air ambulances arrives on Monday in Marathon from Philadelphia. MCSO Trauma Star pilot Duke Nguyen accompanied helicopter representatives on the two-day flight down. MARY MOELLER/Monroe County Fire Rescue



Tail numbers ending in -911RR, -911FK, -911LK pay tribute to former Sheriff Rick Roth, who was instrumental in starting the Trauma Star program, as well as the first responders of the Florida Keys and Lower Keys. ALEX RICKERT/Keys Weekly

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