

DISPATCH Magazine

On-Line

Stories from the on-line edition at www.911Dispatch.com

Volunteers Gave Oakland Dispatchers Breathing Room

When tragedy struck, the dispatchers of California stepped up to help. That's the lesson from the murder of four Oakland (Calif.) police officers last month, an event that plunged the city into grief and stunned law enforcement officers and their dispatchers from around the state--and even around the world. The shooting occurred on a Saturday, and by 6 a.m. the next Wednesday, over 100 dispatchers from 46 agencies across the state were in place to take telephone calls and enter incidents into CAD. That gave OPD's comm center staff of 80 a chance to take time off, attend the Friday memorial service, and to re-group as individuals and a unit before returning to work.

Flu Outbreak Brings Comm Centers Into Focus

The increase in H1N1 flu infections among Americans has triggered federal and state health officials to declare emergencies, and to lean on local public safety comm centers for intelligence about possible new infections. America's reliance on emergency rooms makes comm centers a key source of new reports of symptoms: fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Many citizens have no health insurance and no doctor, and even those with a regular physician may be dialing 911 for medical or hospital assistance. Many comm centers that use an EMS screening protocol have begun asking additional questions of certain callers, including if they have traveled to Mexico, if their fever is higher than 101° F. or if they have respiratory symptoms. Every comm center should have a liaison with health department officials in order to provide first-line information, and to receive advice and assistance on handling incoming calls. Available resources:

- CDC H1N1 flu and the current outbreak info
- CDC specific guidance for comm centers, first-responders
- U.S. DOT guide to preparing PSAPs for pandemic influenza
- NAEMD protocol changes

Verizon Exec Repeats Spectrum Proposal

The general counsel for Verizon Wireless appeared at the National Press Club (Wash., DC) as part of a continuing public relations campaign to convince the FCC not to re-auction spectrum for a national, public safety wireless network. Instead, Steve Zipperstein said the FCC should directly assign frequencies to local or state agencies, who would then create their own local or regional networks, which could be tied together using IP technology. Zipperstein told reporters, "By establishing a national plan that follows these principles, and providing state and local government with federal funding to implement the plan, Congress puts the country in the best position to address its emergency communications need." Zipperstein said his company's plan has wide support from the public safety community, would cost \$15 billion to \$20 billion, and require Congressional approval. The FCC auctioned spectrum last year, but the so-called "D Block" 700 MHz allocated to public safety failed to attract the minimum bid.

April – 2009

Check the Icons!

Check any icons at the end of each story to see if there is on-line material to enhance the story:

 — there's a logging tape posted

 — there's a link or Acrobat (pdf) file posted



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What's Up?

Just when you thought you'd heard everything, along comes an allegation that a dispatcher falsely claimed that she had cancer, and then used donations from individuals and public safety organizations for her personal use, instead of for medical bills. I don't know if it's a case of ordinary greed or a sign of the hard economic times that we're all facing.

On the other hand, the aftermath of the terrible tragedy in Oakland (Calif.) clearly demonstrated something we should all know—there *is* a public safety dispatch community out there, willing to step forward to help in time of need. After the city's dispatchers were knocked back on their heels by the death of four police officers, dispatchers from all over the state arrived to take over comm center duties for almost four days. Besides giving the OPD dispatchers needed time to process their feelings and emotions, the presence of brother and sister dispatchers provided a remarkable level of support during a troubling time.

This month also brought some pretty significant industry news—there are basically just two radio companies who can bid on major public safety systems, and one of them, M/A-COMM, was sold to Harris Corp. The implications of the purchase aren't obvious yet. But Harris is a huge defense-related contractor with lots of expertise in complicated technology systems, especially those related to command and control. Perhaps some of that experience will help M/A-COMM compete better against the other big player, Motorola, which is struggling with its financial performance lately. If you don't follow the financials of these companies, you better start, since public safety communications is so closely tied to them both.

Gary Allen - Editor

DISPATCH Monthly Magazine was founded in 1988 by Alan Burton (1934-2007) with the goals:

Improved training
Improved working conditions
Improved self-esteem
Individual and collective recognition
Enhanced professionalism

Sleuthing Dispatcher Finds Suicidal Man

While still taking 911 calls and performing other work, Lethbridge (Alberta) dispatcher Joel McDonald was doing some investigating last month. A citizen called to report seeing a suicidal message on an Internet forum, and that person apparently lived in Lethbridge. McDonald found the forum, but couldn't drill deeper to find information about the man who posted it until he himself registered on the forum. Once he did that, he found the names of several of the man's on-line friends, and one of them came up with a phone number. McDonald called the man, who admitted to having work and relationship problems. After talking to McDonald, the man accepted help and an officer was dispatched to talk to the man. McDonald was modest--"I'm glad we were able to make a difference," he told a reporter.

DA Charges Dispatcher--Phony Cancer Claim

The Napa County (N. Calif.) district attorney has charged a former Napa city police dispatcher with fraud, forgery and identify theft, alleging that she lied about having cancer and fraudulently collected \$50,000 in pay and public donations intended for medical expenses. Dannille Vanderpool, 33, resigned in January after police learned of the fraud, and then turned herself in for booking this week. A judge ordered her held on \$50,000 bail. Vanderpool's attorney said she suffers from mental illness, and that her behavior was not about the money. Vanderpool told police she has never had cancer, and admitted to forging Kaiser medical forms since 2007. The victims who donated money include several individuals, several law enforcement associations and the 911 CARES program. Vanderpool was a 3-year dispatcher for the agency, and before that worked in the department's records unit. Kevin Willett of the 911 CARES program wrote his followers, "Please don't let the actions of one deter you from helping those in need. Those that really need help are in need and shouldn't suffer due to Dannille's criminal acts." ☞

M/A-COMM Radio Division Sold Off

As part of a continuing attempt to consolidate and streamline its various divisions, Tyco Electronics Ltd. has sold its wireless systems unit to Harris Corp. for \$675 million. The business includes M/A-COMM Critical Communications, one of a handful of companies that market radio equipment and systems to public safety agencies. The does not include M/A-COMM's contract with New York state for a state-wide radio network, which the state cancelled earlier this year over performance issues. Over the last six months Tyco Electronics sold off two other units of its wireless business as part

of the streamlining plan. In a press release, the company said the wireless unit generated sales of \$461 million in fiscal 2008. Tyco Electronics CEO Tom Lynch said the sale would, "increase our focus on our core connectivity business and substantially completes the streamlining of our portfolio that we began two years ago." He called the sale to Harris "an ideal fit" that should "help position the business for accelerated growth." M/A-COMM was formed from various mergers and acquisitions that began with General Electric's radio business in the 1930s, and then Sweden-based Ericsson, ComNet Communications, and finally Tyco International, the parent of Tyco Electronics. Harris Corp. dates to 1890 when two brothers formalized their inventing activities. The company has hundreds of patents covering many industries, but now focuses on communications, semiconductors and electronic systems, notably for defense systems for the government.

Personnel Dismissed After 911 Evidence Released

The Plant City (Fla.) police department has taken a hit after information released by the state Attorney General's office showed that no one investigated a 911 call from a woman who was kidnapped and put into the trunk of her car, and later found murdered. Sgt. James Watkins retired, dispatch supervisor Rita Lipham and Capt. Darrell Wilson resigned, and dispatcher Amanda Hill was fired. Police chief Bill McDaniel said all the actions were in response to mishandling the 911 call and mis-information later released by Wilson, the department's press officer. Watkins and Lipham were 20-year veterans, Hill was a 3-year employee, and Wilson had 16 years with Plant City. Jennifer Johnson talked for 73 seconds before the connection ended, but Hill failed to ask sufficient questions to obtain critical information. McDaniel said she also claimed in press accounts that police policy didn't allow her to call back such a caller, so as not to put the caller in danger. McDaniel said that is incorrect--the policy is to call people back. Lipham failed to have Hill call back the person after being told of the call, and took no further action. Watkins took no action after being notified by Lipham of the call. McDaniel said Wilson lied to reporters, saying that Johnson's call didn't display her telephone number of cellular tower location--it did. McDaniel said the dispatcher did have limited information. But he added, "I am deeply disappointed that a failure is apparent in the actions taken by people in the department during this situation. Perhaps the outcome could have been different had we found out in a timely fashion the who, what, where and why Miss Johnson was calling." Read more about the chief's remorse here.

Officer Critical After Fire Rescue

A Warren (Ohio) police officer and three residents of a group home remain in critical condition after an arson fire trapped them on the third floor of the residence. Off. Doug Hipple arrived at 3:22 a.m. to find the house in flames, and entered after neighbors said persons were trapped. He was able to herd three women to an upstairs room, but the group became trapped there until rescued by firefighters. All suffered smoke inhalation and burns. A car was seen speeding from the area before the fire, which started on the front porch. ☹

Radio Systems Questioned After Officer Injured

Law enforcement officials in the Cincinnati (Ohio) area say that radio communications likely did not contribute to the serious injury of an officer who was laying down spike strips on I-75, and was struck by one of the patrol cars pursuing a bank robbery suspect. Lockland police Off. Brandon Gehring was critically injured as he stood in the right lane of the highway, apparently caught unaware of how close the suspect and pursuing officers were to his location. A long story by the Cincinnati Enquirer suggests that the two different radio systems being used by officers may have contributed to communications delays, leading to a lack of timely information about the chase. But it was the speed of the chase--80 mph--that prevented timely information, police officials say, not phone calls between Hamilton County, Lockland and West Chester. ☹

County Center Spotlighted by Discovery Channel

The Delaware County (Ind.) Emergency Communications Center hosted the video crew from Investigation Discovery Channel's "Call 911" television show, which taped segments with dispatchers and first-responders from two separate incidents that involved 911 calls. The segments will appear during the show's second season, which will premier June 5th. In one segment, a woman calls to report a fire, but hangs up. The dispatcher then calls back, and is on the line as firefighters pull her out of a window to safety. In the second incident, a citizen help corral a 7 year-old who took his grandmother's SUV and drove around the city. The ID channel is available only on digital cable systems, so check your local cable listings for dates and times. ☹

Controversy Over Vote on Consultant's Report

A Placer County (N. Calif.) supervisor says she was confused when she voted to accept a consultant's report that recommends the sheriff close one of its two comm centers. Sup. Jennifer Montgomery says voted only to accept the 167-page report by the Matrix Consulting Group, not to actually approve closing the Tahoe City center and moving operations to the Auburn center. Board of supervisors chair F.C. Rockholm agrees that the vote was only to accept the report, but he noted that the sheriff is the one who will make the final decision on closing the center. The six dispatchers who work at the center near Lake Tahoe say they disagree with the consultant's findings. If the center closes, they would be offered other county jobs. Read the original story about the vote, and then read Montgomery's explanation of her vote. 📄 🗣️

911 Call Leads to Escaped Prisoners

A suspicious citizen dialed 911 in Putnam County (Fla.) to report two men rummaging through his barn, leading deputies to two escaped prisoners who are also accused of a murder after they fled the county jail. During the 911 call, the two suspects approached the caller and asked for him for gasoline--their car had run out of gas nearby. The man said he has no gas, so the two men then asked him for a ride. The caller had to hang up to follow the men, but later called back to say he suspected they were the men wanted for the murder. 🗣️ 🗣️

Tornado Generates Wind, Phone Calls

When a tornado blew in to Murfreesboro (Tenn.) about noon on April 10th, it generated some of the heaviest telephone and radio traffic the dispatchers had ever experienced. Officials said the dispatchers fielded 487 telephone calls within 12 hours, ten times the number on a routine day. Dispatcher Betsy Lee's husband and 11 year-old son were at a church camp, but she continued to focus on calls despite not knowing if they were safe. The off-going shift stayed to continue taking calls, helping until the calls slowed around midnight. 📄 🗣️

Shooting Victim Dials 911 for Daughter

An Appleton (Wisc.) woman who was shot in the chest by her son-in-law managed to dial 911 and rather calmly report, "Shots have been fired..." Barbara Wing arrived at her daughter's home to find estranged husband Scott Schmidt arguing upstairs and waving a gun. Kelly Schmidt came downstairs and ran outside, followed by her husband. Within second Scott Schmidt opened fire

with .22-cal. pistol, hitting his wife, and then he shot Wing in the chest. Wing managed to go back inside to dial 911, as Schmidt shot his wife several more times. An Appleton officer arrived within moments to arrest Schmidt without incident. Wing survived the attack, but Kelly Schmidt did not. 📄 🗣️

Translators Help During 911 Shooting Calls

When a gunman opened fire last week at a Korean religious retreat outside Temecula (S. Calif.), several persons dialed 911 and reached Riverside County sheriff's dispatchers, who had to use translators to gather critical information. The comm center uses the Language Line service, which quickly put Korean translators onto the line to help determine what had occurred and who was shooting at the rural facility. Trained to strictly relay information back and forth between the 911 caller and the dispatcher, the translators in this case had to also provide reassurance to the callers, some of whom had been shot and were distraught. 📄 🗣️

Mayor Dialed 911 for Drunk Friend's Ride

Life is normally quiet in Capitola, a small town of 9,500 along the California's coast near Monterey. So when former mayor Kirby Nicol dialed 911 last month to request a ride for an intoxicated friend, it kicked up some dust. On the logging tape leaked to a local TV station, Nicol's speech sounds slurred as he explains his friend is "in no shape to drive." Nicol had trouble giving the address, but was otherwise polite. The dispatcher tried to suggest a cab, but the mayor was adamant. Now the police officer's association has criticized Nicol for dialing 911 and using an officer for a simple transportation request. Also an issue: Nicol's term ended last year, and the town's police officers were forced onto periodic furloughs to save money, further reducing staffing. 📄 🗣️

Fire Victim Shares Experience With Dispatchers

The victim of a 2006 fatal apartment building fire in Ohio is offering to share his experiences with the nation's dispatchers to help them understand the aftermath of such a tragic event. Donald Noss and his wife Linda survived the nighttime fire when they heard an officer from outside their third-floor apartment, and were rescued by ladder. They heard no building fire alarm, and saw 50-foot flames devouring the building around them. The fire consumed a square block and one resident died. Noss wrote a book about the fire and his experiences, including the fire investigation and transcripts of fire department radio broadcasts. He offers to e-mail any dispatcher a free Acrobat (pdf) copy of the book for information and training. 📄

Internet Offers Tips on Pronouncing Names

Have you ever encountered a name on a written report or in CAD and had no idea how to pronounce it? Now there are two Internet sites devoted to gathering the specifics of how to speak names in various languages. Both Web sites are rather new and growing, and they take two different approaches to pronunciations--one uses actual audio files to provide examples, while the other uses dictionary-type notation to provide clues. Both sites are actively soliciting help in documenting names. ☞

\$20,000 Radios? Legislator Says 'Stop!'

A Virginia state legislator has asked state department of transportation officials for details on a program to equip highway trucks with radios that can access the state police radio network--at \$20,000 each. Delegate Todd Gilbert (R) said the program would cost \$500,000, which could be better spent on other projects. He noted that DOT truck drivers can use their existing radio to reach a DOT dispatcher to call police, or dial 911 from their state-issued cellular phone. The DOT operates two VHF systems, one in the 47 MHz band and a less-used trunked system (STARS) in the 150 MHz band. The state police operate a conventional system in the 159 MHz band, and five districts have begun using the state's STARS system. ☞

Oklahoma Legislature Unsure--Funding or Cutback?

Legislators in Oklahoma took steps in opposite directions within four days, voting to cut the statewide 911 surcharge by 70% one day, and then forming a legislative task force to study how upgrade the state's 911 system. Rep. Mike Reynolds (R) proposed an amendment to an existing bill that would cut the surcharge from 50¢ to 15¢, as part of an overall reduction in state taxes. The amendment passed 75-21 and now goes to the Senate for consideration. Reynolds said the proposed fee reduction has nothing to do with 911 services, but rather the public's recent request for reduced taxes. He pointed to the recent "tea party" protests, saying, "Tax payers want to see their money is used appropriately or they want it back. They want it back and this was a great example to do that." Just four days earlier, the legislature named members to a group that will study "possible changes needed...as technology continuously evolves." The 10-member task force will examine rural 911 availability and the increasing use of cellular phones to make 911 calls. ☞

Dispatcher's Instinct Signaled Danger at House

Veteran Fayette County (Penn.) dispatcher Colleen Rummell didn't know exactly what was wrong at a Uniontown home when she dialed back a hang-up 911 call. But while talking to the 12 year-old resident, she knew it was bad. She and her co-workers sent fire, EMS and police units to the home, where they found a family overcome by carbon monoxide gas from a faulty furnace. The victims were flown to a hospital and recovered, while the dispatchers and field teams were honored for helping rescue the victims. ☞

Chicago Police Beats Criticized for Response Times

The city of Chicago's police beat system doesn't provide equal service to the city's many districts, according to a city council member, leaving southside residents waiting hours for an officer to arrive in response to their calls. Council member Isaac Carothers produced figures showing the city's northside beats experienced 10 "no beat car available" incidents during 2008, while southside beats had 1,200 "no beat" incidents. He intends to introduce legislation to speed up the police department's current beat plan study that would redraw beat boundaries and reallocate officers to match the location of incidents. But police officials say the process of modifying beats--not done since 1985--is complex and time-consuming. Dep. Supt. Dan Dugan explained that CPD sends officers to 68% of the telephone calls that dispatchers receive, compared to about 30% for other major American cities. ☞

Dispatcher Honored, Thanked by Victims

Trapped under tons of ice after they walked into a snow cave outside of Seattle (Wash.), two boys could only wait until firefighters cut them out with chainsaws and other rescue equipment last August. Yesterday the boys and their parents met with Eastside Regional Communications Center (Bellevue) dispatcher Becky McCracken to thank her for handling their 911 call for help, which last one hour. ☞ ☺

Bobcat Attack Prompts 911 Call

When a mother and her two teen daughters were attacked by a bobcat in a rural Prescott (Ariz.) park, the fight began. The cat lunged at 13 year-old Christina Montonati and bit her on the leg and hip. Her mother Lisa immediately jumped on the animal and grabbed its neck, but was bitten several times on her arms. Daughter Talisa began throwing rocks at the bobcat to scare it

away, and then dialed 911 for help. The bobcat ran off, but fearing it was rabid, game officials later tracked and killed the animal. 📞 🐾

Rookie Handles 911 Call: Intruder Shot

With just six months of dispatching experience, Bote-tourt County (Virg.) dispatcher Laura Crawford jumped into a 911 call from a man who reported an intruder, and who then shot and killed the man. The man initially reported a stranger outside his home at night, with his wife and children inside. Within a short time, the man broke a back glass window and came into the house. The homeowner fired a shotgun at the man twice, killing him. "I just sat there. I was in shock. It just shocked me how fast it went to someone's outside to someone's laying outside," Crawford told a reporter. 📞

NENA's Input on Broadband Stimulus Funding

The federal government's economic stimulus package includes funding for improving the nation's broadband infrastructure, particularly the nation's underserved, rural areas. Now NENA has submitted comments to the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), which will administer this funding, saying it should include the nation's PSAPs, even though such agencies were never specifically mentioned in the original funding legislation. According to NENA, the funding offers, "a significant opportunity to foster the migration from analog, voice-centric 9-1-1 and emergency communications systems, into a 21st century, next generation, IP broadband-based emergency services model that embraces a wide range of voice, video, and data applications." The group says that the NTIA should confer with state officials when establishing grants programs, "but states should not be the gatekeeper of all funds to be allocated within each state." 📞

Police Study 911 Calls After Murder-Suicide

There was confusion among officers, dispatchers and 911 callers over the location of events that ended with a murder-suicide in Frisco (Tex.) last weekend, and sent armed police storming inside the wrong residence. A couple had a disagreement at 9130 Apollo Court, and the male threatened his wife with a gun. Their 12 year-old daughter ran up their cul-de-sac road, and around the corner to a neighbor's house at 4050 Palace Place for help, where resident Greg Brenner dialed 911. However, he gave the police dispatcher the incident location as "9130 Palace Place," confusing his street name and the incident location's house number. The calltaker tried to obtain a better address from the man, and then from the

young girl. Meanwhile, police had been dispatched to the caller's residence, based on the ANI/ALI information. The female resident Jody Hoover then heard police arrive, saw someone with a gun, and believed it was the gunman coming to her house. She alerted her husband, who armed himself with a handgun. The wife then dialed 911 and told dispatchers that someone was trying to get into their house. At one point she recognized that it was the police and yelled "Police!" But the dispatcher apparently believed that meant she urgently needed the police. Officers who believed they were at the right house broke down the door to forcibly confront the homeowners. It took 12 minutes for officers to discover the error and arrive at the correct location, where the man had already shot and killed his wife, and then killed himself. 📞

A Bible Becomes Symbol of Thanks

As a dispatcher, it doesn't get any better than the reunion between Collier County (Fla.) sheriff's dispatch supervisor Julie Becker and the man's whose life she helped save. Becker hugged Lee Lustig, who suffered a heart ailment in March, and his wife Diane, who dialed 911 and followed Becker's CPR instructions to bring her husband back to life. According to officials, Lee Lustig has a genetic heart condition, and was turning black before his wife began CPR. On the logging tape of the call, Becker is totally focused on giving Diane the instructions. Diane told Becker, "We know he's going to heaven, but I would like him with me a little longer." During the emotion reunion, the Lustig's presented Becker with a Bible as a thank-you gift. "We love you. Oh, we love you," Diane told Becker. 📞 📖

County Asks for Outside Review of Center

Allegheny County (Penn.) officials have asked the state's emergency management agency and the National Emergency Number Association (NENA) to review their comm center policies and procedures, specifically those that applied to the handling of a mother-son disagreement that ended with the shooting deaths of three Pittsburgh officers on April 4th. One dispatcher has been put on administrative leave with pay after the incident, which began with a call from the mother asking police to remove her adult son from the home. The unnamed calltaker asked about the presence of guns, and the mother told him, "Yes...but they're all legal." The dispatcher failed to follow up on that response or include the presence of weapons in the CAD incident information. The two responding officers were shot when they entered the home, and a third officer died as he arrived in response to calls reporting the shootings. County executive Dan Onorato said, "If we receive any

recommendations, we'll certainly make those public and implement them as soon as possible. As it stands now, our position is that this is an isolated incident of human error rather than a failing of our policies and procedures." However, the police union president has an alternate opinion. 🗨️

NTW Generates Press Coverage

This year's National Public Safety Telecommunicator's Week has generated several stories in local newspapers: Knox County (Tenn.) 911 dispatcher Alecia Wilson was named Telecommunicator of the Year at her center; the work is demanding at the Brazos County (Tex.) 911 center; Grand Island dispatchers were spotlighted for their hard work; Rockford (Ill.) police put their citizen's academy through the comm center; the city of Yuma (Ariz.) honors its dispatchers; Douglas County's (Kan.) comm center is explained; Ashe County (NC) dispatchers were honored by the city; and the Raleigh-Wake (NC) 911 Center honored their employee and rookie of the year [Kevin Anderson (l.) and Heather Fletcher (r.) in photo. 🗨️

Did Cleveland Make \$2.3 Million Radio Mistake?

Controversy is swirling around the city of Cleveland's (Ohio) radio system after the local newspaper revealed that officials there used \$2.3 million from a homeland security grant to buy a Motorola radio zone controller last year, locking the city in to only Motorola gear for a future upgrade. The Plain-Dealer story also pointed out that the city didn't make certain parts of their upgrade Request for Proposal public, nor are they encouraging bidders to visit existing radio sites and comm centers. The entire effect of the story is to suggest that Motorola has blocked other potential bidders from bidding, and for less money. 🗨️

Dispatcher Suspended Over Campaign Signs

Lake County (Ill.) sheriff Mark Curran has suspended dispatcher Shantel Taylor after allegations were made that she tore down the her rival's campaign signs for the city of Zion city council. Taylor will be paid during an investigation of the charges. According to Curran, a sheriff's employee noticed Taylor arriving at the sub-station in Libertyville, removing campaign signs from her trunk and throwing them in a dumpster. Another employee found the signs in the dumpster and noticed they were for Taylor's opponent in the election campaign. Curran said Taylor is an 11-year veteran of the agency, and that the matter has been referred to the

county state's attorney's office. Taylor received the most votes in the election among 10 candidates for two council seats. 🗨️

Dispatcher Handled Both 'Good' and 'Bad' Calls

Dane County (Wisc.) officials have acknowledged that it was dispatcher Nathan Waite who handled the exemplary 911 call involving a childbirth, and then two months later fielded a 911 call involving a carbon monoxide death that generated a complaint by Madison police. In January, county officials held a press conference to praise Waite's handling of the 911 call from a man and his wife who pulled over while enroute to the hospital. Waite assisted with the delivery of the baby, 12 weeks premature. But it was also Waite who answered the 911 call on March 7th from a woman who asked if it were legal to leave a car running in front of her house for several hours. When Waite told her no laws applied, the woman hung up in disgust. County officials say the 7-year veteran dispatcher did nothing improper. But the caller told Madison police that she felt that Waite had "blown her off." Several hours later the driver of the car was discovered dead, apparently of accidental carbon monoxide poisoning. Madison police filed a formal complaint, saying the 911 call had been mishandled. 🗨️



Caller Reports Burglary Witnessed on Webcam

A Boynton Beach (Fla.) woman set up a Webcam keep an eye on her home while she was at work, but usually saw only her two dogs wandering the home. Last week, two men joined the dogs at mid-day, prompting her to dial 911 and report that her home was being burglarized. Indeed, officers arrived to capture two suspects outside, and police say that pair pointed to a nearby residence where their buddies were burglarizing a home. Police captured those two suspects, too. A video of the Webcam has made the rounds on the Internet, and now the logging tape of the woman's 911 call to a Boynton Beach dispatcher has been released. 🗨️

New VoIP Device Prompts APCO Action

The Association of Public Safety Communications Officials (APCO) has posted information about the new MagicJack device, which allows computer users to make VoIP telephone calls at inexpensive rates, but which raises several 911 access questions. The device plugs into a computer's USB port, and is similar to existing VoIP connection devices. However, its simplicity may mean users don't register their location, or they may encounter problems when dialing 911. MagicJack claims

that the FCC's rules on VoIP/911 access don't apply to them, but add that the company has "chosen to voluntarily offer E911 services where available." APCO officials recently visited MagicJack's headquarters in Florida, and they have posted information (pdf) about the device, along with several contact telephone numbers for resolving problems. ☞

Dispatcher Grievance May Lead to New Hiring

A union grievance filed in 2007 by Phoenix (Ariz.) fire dispatchers has worked its way through the city bureaucracy, and prompted a city study of comm center staffing that may lead to additional job positions. The dispatchers complained that incidents have increased 73 percent since 1997 with the addition of dispatching duties for several other jurisdictions. In particular, the dispatchers now handle EMD duties, which is very time consuming. The center has recently hired 10 new dispatchers to augment the staff of 73, but the study by the city's Budget and Research Department may prompt the city to raise its per-call fees to other cities from the current \$23.12 per dispatched incident. ☞

Baby Was Born "Justin Time"

Kudos to Boca Raton (Fla.) dispatcher Jessica Sullivan, who assisted new parents in delivering their baby boy Justin three or four days early. Kenn Haupt said he was soundly sleeping and 15 minutes later, he was a father. When Haupt told an obstetrics nurse they had named the boy Justin, the nurse cracked, "Just in time..." ☞ 🎉

Citizen Is Hero After Tragic Family Murders

When a Santa Clara (N. Calif.) man went on a suicidal rampage and murdered five family members, his wounded wife staggered outside her apartment and collapsed from gunshot wounds. A neighbor heard the commotion, came outside and found Abha Appu bloody and unable to speak. But the woman, whose identity is being withheld, rushed to Appu's side to cradle her in one arm, while dialing 911 with the other hand. During a 10-minute call with a police dispatcher, the woman urgently described the situation, including information from another neighbor that the husband has shot his family. Despite the potential danger of being in front of the apartment door, the woman stayed with the victim until police and paramedics arrived. ☞ 🎉

FCC 'Stimulates' Public Safety Wireless Data

The FCC has issued a Report and Order that will help "stimulate the economy," in the Commission's word, by expanding and enhancing first responders' deployment of broadband communication technologies in the 4.9 GHz band. A portion of the 4.9 GHz band was allocated to public safety in 2003, and has been lightly used, mostly by large agencies for point-to-point video surveillance systems. The current order sets regulations that give primary status to the fixed-link 4.9 GHz systems that connect video and other types of systems, set revised power measurement procedures to make them easier and quicker to get approved, and made certain VHF radio rule changes. In particular, the FCC cleaned up several rule sections to clarify that cross-band repeaters are permitted in all public safety radio bands. In a statement, FCC acting chair Michael Copps said the rules give agencies "more operational flexibility" to deploy wireless networks and share information. ☞

NY State Interop Program Turns Regional

In the wake of terminating a \$2 billion radio contract with M/A-COMM, the state of New York will not pursue a statewide public safety radio network, but instead will construct interoperable regional systems to connect agencies. The state offices formed to manage the statewide project are being reorganized and focused on the new goals. State officials say that 19 of the state's 62 counties are already either operating or will build interoperable systems, covering 31% of the state. ☞

Editorial: The Best & Worst in Two Days

In the space of two days we learned of some heroic work by dispatchers in Binghamton (NY), and then of disappointing work of dispatchers in Plant City (Fla.) and Pittsburgh (Penn.). How could these incidents be so far apart? In the first case, kudos to the staff of the Broome County comm center who fielded calls from people who had been wounded, including receptionist Shirley DeLucia, who stayed on the phone with dispatcher Kenny Hayes for 54 minutes, giving him valuable information about the situation inside. They also had to handle all the non-emergency telephone and radio traffic, including helping coordinate the response of scores of other units from dozens of law enforcement and other agencies. And yet, at almost the same time, police officials in two cities are saying that their dispatchers failed to properly handle 911 calls. In Plant City, a dispatcher resigned and another was fired for mishandling a 911 call last Nov. from a kidnap victim who was later found murdered. In Pittsburgh, it's the unthinkable--police say a calltaker didn't relay infor-

mation about weapons to officers. Three officers died when the caller's son opened fire on them when they entered the house. I wish there were new lessons here, or something new to take away from how they were handled. But we already know it's a serious business. Now, everyone else does, too.

Nominations Still Open for PSAP Awards

A reminder that nominations are open until June 1st for the annual PSAP's Finest Awards, given out by recording technology company NICE Systems at the APCO conference each August. In a press release, the company explains that recipients are selected in four categories: Telecommunicator of the Year, Line Supervisor of the Year, Technician of the Year, and Communications Center Director of the Year. In its fourth year, top award winners will be judged and selected by a panel of their public safety peers. "Candidates will be evaluated based on their exemplary achievements, depth of knowledge, innovative thinking, involvement and years of service to public safety, as well as other key criteria," the company said. Nominations can be submitted on-line. ☞

911 Call Mishandled in Fatal Officer Shootings

It was a 911 call to the Allegheny County (Penn.) comm center that began the showdown between three Pittsburgh police officers and an ex-Marine that ended with three officers dead and the suspect wounded. The mother of Richard Poplawski dialed 911 when she awoke last Saturday to find her 23 year-old son's dog had urinated on the carpet--she wanted him removed from the house. As Off. Paul Sciuolo and Stephen Mayhele arrived and entered the home, Poplawski opened fire with an assault rifle, killing both officers. When Off. Eric Kelly arrived in response to neighbors' calls of gunfire, he was also fatally shot. So far police have not released a more specific timeline of the 911 call, dispatch and arrival times, nor have they been specific with what the dispatcher and Poplawski's mother said during the call. None of the logging tapes have been released. Later on the day of the shooting, officers held a "final radio rollcall" for the three officers. ☞

Hidden in Boiler Room, Immigrants Dial 911

Despite their inexperience with the English language, and their relatively short stay in America, a group of 14 immigrants knew they could dial 911 from a basement boiler room when an intruder began shooting at the American Civic Association in Binghamton (NY) last Friday. The gunman eventually shot and killed 13 students at the center, wounded another four and

then killed himself. When the shooting began, a large group of people were practicing their English lessons on the ground floor. Several ran downstairs to escape the gunfire, eventually finding the boiler room and its thick, insulated door to protect them. One person had a cellular phone and--thankfully--there was signal coverage from the room. Teacher Katherine Gruss stayed on the phone through five batteries to give information to a dispatcher and to, finally, receive instructions on their rescue by SWAT teams. ☞

Suicidal Woman Uses Twitter for Help

Proving that dispatchers must be informed about all methods of communications, San Jose (Calif.) police say they received "numerous" calls from around the world warning them of a woman in that city who was using Twitter to make suicide threats. Police said they located the woman unharmed, and took her to a psychiatric facility for evaluation. The threats came to light as the woman was following the "tweets" of actress Demi Moore. You may know that Twitter allows members to send/post messages (140 characters or less!) to the Twitter computers. Twitter members can also subscribe to other members' accounts, creating a vast, complex and sometimes crazy network of posters and followers. In this case, the San Jose woman was following Demi Moore's tweets, and then posting her own messages, which were then visible to others who were also following Moore's messages. Beyond personal communications, Twitter is now being used by companies, associations and other groups to quickly communicate with their members (CNN, Martha Stewart, Ustream TV, John Mayer, NBA...and the list goes on). ☞

Verizon Exec Has 700 MHz Recommendation

The CEO of Verizon Wireless has a suggestion on how to allocate the portion of the 700 MHz band that didn't attract bidders last year--give it away directly to public safety agencies. During the annual CTIA conference in Las Vegas this week, Verizon Wireless CEO Ivan Seidenberg told an audience, "We cannot afford to wade through another round of auctions and redundant network construction." Instead, he said that state and local public safety agencies could partner with local network providers "to create the robust interoperable system this country needs." The FCC attempted to auction off 10 MHz of 700 MHz spectrum last year for a public safety network--the so-called D Block--but it attracted only one bid that fell far short of the commission's \$1.3 billion minimum bid. The FCC is now considering whether to re-auction the spectrum, or come up with another method of creating a public safety network. Read Seidenberg's entire speech here.

Sprint, City Battle Over 'Look' of Radio Controls

Among all the multi-billion dollar work to reband the 800 MHz band to help prevent interference to public safety 800 MHz radio systems, the city of High Point (NC) had one complaint--the 129 radios that Sprint offered to replace for free didn't have the same "look and feel" as their current radios. The FCC mandated the rebanding in 2004 in response to several proposals to reduce interference, and Nextel (later purchased by Sprint) offered to fund all costs in exchange for various spectrum.

Trial Raises Questions About 911 Call, Truthfulness

The Florida State Attorney's office has released 700 pages of documents related to last year's murder of Jennifer Johnson, ahead of the trial of her accused murderer. The materials include an 80-second logging tape of a 911 call Johnson made while she was trapped inside the trunk of a car moving through Plant City. The call did not generate any ALI/ANI information, and she could not describe her location or the vehicle. The unnamed Plant City police dispatcher did not send officers to investigate. After Johnson's body was found, police claimed an officer had been dispatched to investigate after the 911 call. The court documents now dispute that, saying no one was dispatched. The officer who was assigned after the incident was actually sent to an unrelated incident.

