

# DISPATCH Magazine


*On-Line*

Stories from the on-line edition at [www.911Dispatch.com](http://www.911Dispatch.com)

## Denise Lee Killer Found Guilty

After just two hours of deliberation, a Sarasota County (Fla.) jury has found Michael King guilty of the kidnap, rape and murder of Denise Lee last January. King faces the death penalty in the case, which raised questions about how dispatchers at two sheriff's comm centers handled 911 calls and other communications related to the incident. The jury heard one week of testimony, although the defense presented no evidence. The prosecutor presented forensic evidence from King's car, witness testimony and two 911 calls to make the murder case. Lee's husband Nathan has said through a spokesperson that he intends to file a civil lawsuit next month, presumably against the sheriff's offices and dispatchers. Nathan Lee and Lee's father, Rick Goff, have been advocating for mandatory, standardized training for Florida dispatchers. They have recently expanded their efforts to include dispatchers nationwide.

## AT&T Doesn't Support SMS for 911

At least one cellular carrier says it doesn't believe that SMS or text messages from cellular telephones are an appropriate way to reach emergency dispatchers, even though a former NENA president says he's ready to implement the technology. In a statement to North Carolina TV station WRAL, the company said, "AT&T believes that text messaging via SMS is an inappropriate mechanism for any time-sensitive, mission-critical communications." The company was referring to the technology used to transmit the messages, and the priority used to move the messages through AT&T's network. On the other hand, Johnston County (NC) 911 director Jason Barbour says he's pushing for implementation of the technology after Blackhawk County (Iowa) became the first comm center to accept text messages to 911 earlier this month. "What we're waiting on now is for the phone companies and the standards to get in place so that this type of media can be transmitted to the 911 centers," Barbour told the TV reporter. 

## Milestone: TTY Inventor Started As Dentist

James C. Marsters was interested in so many things--a licensed orthodontist, an airplane pilot and a professional magician. But his lasting achievement will be the acoustic modem device he developed to connect the deaf with each other, and eventually with public safety comm centers via 911. Marsters himself was deaf but never let that fact limit his activities before he died last month at age 83. He developed the TTY after brainstorming with Robert Weitbrecht, a physicist and teletype hobbyist who was also deaf. Marsters and two partners founded a company in 1964 to market their new device, which originally used huge AT&T teletype machines to generate characters at one end, and to print out the message at the other end. Later, competitors developed smaller models with integrated keyboards, all based on Marsters' designs. Today there are alternative methods for the deaf to communicate, but TTY devices remain an important link for the deaf.

**August – 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?

The family of Denise Lee received some measure of justice this month when a Florida jury found Michael King guilty of her 2008 kidnapping and murder. But while justice brings satisfaction to the criminal justice system, it brings none to the hearts of those who loved Ms. Lee. At the same time, one wonders what has changed at the two sheriff's comm centers involved in this incident, what training or procedure changes have been made, or even what soul-searching dispatchers across the country have done about the mistakes that were made. It might be easy to forget that *every* task a dispatcher performs can have an effect, either good or bad. To insure the "good," dispatchers must be conscientious, and the comm centers themselves must be organized to eliminate mistakes. Examine your own skills and your comm center's procedures—are they good enough?

Not far away, the family of Walker County (Geo.) Sheriff's dispatcher Theresa Parker's family began the same long process of receiving justice, as Parker's husband stood trial for her murder in 2007. The evidence is largely circumstantial, although there seems to be a lot of it. Sam Parker is a former police officer, and was admittedly upset with Ms. Parker, believing that she was having an affair. No matter the details, Ms. Parker disappeared in March 2007, and her body has never been found.

In other news, Calgary (Alb.) dispatchers voted to strike (but never did), a dispatcher was fired for illegally accessing criminal justice computer systems, and a man found guilty of SWATing began serving his 11 year sentence. And lastly, absolutely *no* news about the 700 MHz spectrum—yikes!

### Gary Allen - Editor

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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

## Durham Dispatcher Fired After Vonage Call

A three-year Durham (NC) Emergency Communications Center dispatcher has been fired for mishandling a 911 call reporting a fatal fire, made on a Vonage VoIP telephone line, and which didn't display the caller's telephone number or address. Theresa Hopkins did not follow the comm center's procedures for handling such calls, center director James Soukup said, and was terminated last Thursday. Marvin Jacobs died in the fire, but fire officials weren't sure if the 4-1/2 minute response delay created by Hopkins entering the wrong address contributed to his death. During a press conference to discuss the circumstances of the incident, Soukup said the caller correctly spelled the street name three times. However, Hopkins entered a similarly-sounding street name into CAD, sending fire units six miles south of the fire. Soukup said Hopkins could have asked for a cross-street or district name when questioning the caller, but did not. ☎ 📞

## Police Fire Dispatcher After Murder-Suicide

A dispatcher who was just fired by the Orlando (Fla.) police department for mishandling 911 calls related to a March 2009 murder-suicide says that he did nothing wrong, and that he is appealing his termination. Alan Ballard, 60, made several mistakes, police said, leading to mis-prioritization of one 911 call and the delay of officers in looking for the victim, who a co-worker reported had been kidnapped by an ex-boyfriend. "Our employees have to be held accountable for their actions," Sgt. Barbara Jones said. Ballard was skeptical when talking to the co-worker, and didn't enter the incident into CAD for 23 minutes. He also classified it as a suspicious incident, not as a kidnapping, which the co-worker clearly described. ☎ 📞

## Atlanta's 911 Director Fired

Atlanta (Geo.) police chief Richard Pennington has issued a short statement saying that he has fired 911 Center director Miles Butler, but did not provide any details about why he took the action. Butler has been under fire since January when the response to a house fire was delayed by 20 minutes, apparently because of a dispatcher error. In May another delayed response to a fire was blamed on staffing shortages and a heavy volume of incoming telephone calls. City council member C.T. Martin said he's fielded complaints about the center "all the time." His reaction to the firing was simple--"He's

always been a problem as far as I'm concerned. The job was bigger than he was able to handle." Butler declined comment to a newspaper reporter. Butler retired from the Air Force, was 911 director for Forsyth County (Geo.), and most recently worked for a rescue equipment manufacturer. 📞

## Parent's Stunned by Son's Death

The president of a University of North Carolina fraternity was shot and killed by a police officer along Interstate 40 last weekend, leaving his friends and family with no explanation of why he was driving at 5 a.m., where he was going, or why he was threatening suicide to a dispatcher during a 911 call. Courtland Smith, 21, died after a Archdale police officer fired four times as they stood along the highway. Friends say Smith was in no distress when they saw him at the fraternity house at 2 a.m. But Guilford Metro 911 officials released a logging tape of the 911 call made about three hours later with Smith sounding drunk, and telling the dispatcher, "I'm trying to kill myself on I-40." He refused to pull over, and at one point flirted with the dispatcher and tried to find out where she was located. Towards the end of the 15-minute call, he said officers were following him, and he apparently pulled over. The sounds of an officer can be heard on the 911 call tape, along with someone saying, "I've got to pull something out." The shooting occurred after the call ended. Police have not confirmed if Smith actually was carrying a firearm. 📞 🚓

## Google Expands Traffic Maps

Police officers, sheriff's deputies, EMS units and fire engines are always trying to get somewhere quickly, and now Google has upgraded its mapping service to show traffic congestion for local streets. The new service could be used by dispatchers or emergency workers to plot their response to incidents. Google's maps have long been able to show traffic for major highways and streets, coding them as green, yellow and red to indicate congestion. The information is obtained from roadside sensors operated by several companies, relayed to Google and integrated with maps. Now, Google will begin receiving speed data from motorists who are using Google Mobile on their smartphone, and analyzing it to create local street congestion data. The company says that the more persons who drive with their Google Mobile application running, the more accurate the results. 📞

## Denise Lee Murder Trial Begins--That 911 Call

For the very first time, the public heard the desperate 911 call the Denise Lee made in the midst of her kidnapping in Jan. 2008, and before she was raped, murdered and then buried next to a highway not far from her North Port (Fla.) home. The 911 logging tape of the call was played Tuesday during the trial of Michael King, who apparently picked Lee at random, drove her around and finally killed her. Besides Lee's 911 call, a motorist dialed 911 to report Lee pounding on the windows of an adjacent car moving along a highway. Despite the two calls, Lee was not rescued. Former Sarasota County sheriff's dispatcher Kathy Jackson testified Tuesday that she fell into a deep depression after handling the 911 call, resigned from her job and moved back to her home state of Iowa. "She did everything right to save herself," Jackson told the court. "It breaks my heart to think how she tried so hard and we still couldn't save her." Indeed, on the tape Lee tries to secretly provide information about her location using King's cellular phone. At times Lee can apparently hear Jackson, but other times, she cannot. Several times King angrily asks Lee where his phone is. Several times Lee begs King, "Where are we?" hoping the location will help lead to her rescue. The call lasted six minutes, during which Jackson testified that her co-workers were feeding her questions and trying to determine Lee's location. "Denise's voice haunts me," Jackson said. "I'm just hoping this trial will bring some closure to that." She now works in Iowa City as a university police dispatcher. The trial Read more about Jackson here. The trial is being streamed live on the Herald-Tribune newspaper Web site. 📞

## Trial Underway in Dispatcher's Murder

Jurors from adjacent Bartow County (Geo.) are hearing testimony in the trial of Sam Parker, accused of murdering Walker County sheriff's dispatcher Teresa Parker in March 2007. Parker disappeared and her body has never been found, but the prosecutor believes he has enough evidence to convict Parker, a former LaFayette police officer. Publicity about the case, including weeks of searching by sheriff's deputies and citizens, convinced the Superior Court judge to use jurors from another county, although the trial is being held in LaFayette. So far, testimony has laid out that the Parkers were in the process of a divorce, and Teresa was moving from LaFayette to Fort Oglethorpe. A former LaFayette officer testified that Sam Parker told him he shot Parker in the head and buried her, "in a place that no one can find." Ben Chaffin said Parker threatened to kill him if he ever told anyone about the murder. Various witnesses have about Sam Parker's suspicions that his wife was hav-

ing an affair and of threats that Sam Parker made. A Walker County dispatcher testified about calls she took from Sam Parker, and logging tapes were played during which Parker speculated that Teresa was having an affair. The trial is being extensively covered by the Walker County Messenger newspaper, including stories and in-court videos.

## Canada Finalizes 800 MHz Band Plan for PS

Following the United States by several years, a Canadian government agency has approved a spectrum plan for public safety radio operations in the 700 MHz band. Industry Canada takes into account TV frequency assignments and the digital transition, public safety's need for more spectrum, the existing U.S. band plan near the border, and the need to narrowband individual frequency assignments. Like the U.S. plan developed by the FCC, the Canadian band plan has a complex timetable to permit an orderly transition from analog to digital, and from one band to another. ☞

## Harassing 911 Calls, Now An Apology

According to Peter Dubois, he picked the Portsmouth (NH) police comm center at random for a year-long series of harassing 911 calls starting in Nov. 2007. Dubois used an unregistered cellular phone to make nearly 100 calls, which became more profane as time went on. Finally a subpoena and technicians tracked Dubois to Vermont, where he was arrested last October and charged with 41 counts of telephone harassment. Now a Portsmouth District Court judge has sentenced Dubois to 90 days in jail, suspended if he complies with the other conditions: write a letter of apology to the dispatchers attend counseling and pay restitution to the police department for lost time handling his calls. In exchange, 37 of the counts were dropped. Dubois is due back in court in December to judge how he's meeting the conditions.

## Guilty of SWATing, Prisoner Recalls Early Days

For Matthew Weigman, his blindness was apparently his downfall. In a long article in the latest issue of Rolling Stone magazine, Weigman recounts his early childhood fascination with the nation's telephone systems, and how he used phone chat rooms to mask his insecurities, and eventually to prove his worth by making false reports of emergencies to public safety comm centers across the country. Weigman just started serving 11 years in federal prison for his part in mis-using the telephone networks, intimidating a telephone company witness and fraud. His lack of sight made his hearing more

acute, Weigman says, allowing him to hear TouchTones, overhear voices and accents, and to recall the tiniest detail with ease. But his focus on a telephone lifestyle also led him to darker traits, including demanding phone sex with those he harassed, and then sending police to their homes when they refused. ☞

## City Debuts E-Mail 911 Service

Yet another city has taken singular action to embrace the Internet by creating a "911" e-mail address and announcing they are accepting emergency electronic messages instead of dialing 911 on their telephone. City officials in Redlands (Calif.) said they still prefer citizens to use the telephone when reporting emergencies, but said the new service was for when, "someone is in a situation where they can't call." They also acknowledged that an e-mail message is not interactive and can't pinpoint the sender's location. According to a city spokesperson, when an e-mail addressed to 911@redlandspolice.org arrives, "alarm bells" sound and a dispatcher will read the e-mail and take appropriate action. City officials didn't mention that the Internet provides no routing or receipt confirmation to the sender. Police Cmdr. Tom Fitzmaurice said it didn't cost anything to set up the special address, and that the department has several other addresses for specific problems, including graffiti, blight and crime tips. Last month Blackhawk County (Iowa) became the first comm center to accept emergency text messages.

## New Google App Offers Voice Telecom Features

Apparently having conquered the Web search and advertising fields, Google is now attempting to improve your telephone service with the new Google Voice service. Several of the features might be applicable to the operation of a comm center, although perhaps not for critical operations. Available only by invitation in its early stages, GV will assign you a new telephone number (most area codes are represented) to become your new one point of contact. You can then log into your account with a Web browser and completely configure what happens when someone dials that number, including the presence and content of a recorded greeting, what other cellular or wired telephones will ring, and how voicemail is recorded. You can be notified as someone is leaving a greeting, and you can listen in to hear what they say, and chose to immediately accept the call. Once the voicemail message is left, you can have GV notify you by e-mail or SMS message, and have GV convert the message to text. There are tons of other features that will excite your imagination. Surf here for more information about the service and to sign up to receive an invitation.

## European Union Urges Vehicle Emergency Reporting

Leaping far beyond American plans to improve highway safety, the European Union (EU) is urging member nations to speed up voluntary adoption of eCall, a system of automatic emergency notification after a vehicle crash, saying it could save 2,500 lives a year. In 2005 the EU commission called upon telecom providers, vehicle manufacturers and public agencies to develop and install the necessary equipment to enable eCall by 2009. The commission issued a reminder again in 2006. But now, the EU commission says, "So far the system is not operational in any EU country." The commission has re-set the clock on the adoption of eCall, calling for systems in all nation's by 2014. Download (pdf) the latest description of eCall here. In an unrelated development, negotiations between Hughes Telematics and car company Chrysler to install gear in several vehicle models have failed to reach an agreement. Chrysler was to have included Hughes gear in their cars by the end of this year.

## Confronted With Warrant, Dispatcher Resigns

A strange set of circumstances has led to the resignation of a DeSoto Parish (La.) Sheriff's dispatcher, and to the discovery that she has a previous criminal history. Enika Friesenhahn had an active felony warrant for check fraud in San Antonio (Tex.), one that had been active since 1976. Sheriff's officials said the warrant was discovered by chance: Friesenhahn was off sick, and her co-workers asked a sheriff's sergeant to check on her. When the sergeant arrived, he wasn't sure of the address, so he ran the license plate of a car parked in the driveway. When he read the "hit," it included the warrant information. Confronted with the warrant, Friesenhahn chose to resign. However, a month later, she appealed her decision to the county's personnel board, asking to return to work. However, comm center director Bruce Vanderhoeven researched Friesenhahn's past, and discovered other incidents: a 1985 obscenity arrest, two DWI arrests and a 2005 failed drug test. The board declined to re-hire Friesenhahn.

## 100 Year-Old Dispatcher Recalls the Past

Nothing is the same after 100 years, and former Birmingham (Ala.) police dispatcher Claude Gray says that applies to comm centers, too. He joined the police department in 1933, and returned to the comm center Wednesday to celebrate his recent birthday and the department's first radio broadcast to police officers. On June 10, 1933 Gray turned on the transmitter for the

first time, and then broadcast the time and the callsign WPFM. There were 10 patrol cars and one motorcycle equipped with radios at the time. "What we have today was built on the shoulders of people like Mr. Gray," said police Capt. William Brewer, who oversees the department's Support Systems Bureau. By the way, the first official broadcast was a stolen vehicle alert to all units, followed by a message for the patrol sergeant to meet the captain at the city garage.

## Response Delayed to Fatal Fire Reported via Vonage

A Vonage telephone subscriber in Durham County (SC) dialed 911 to report a fatal fire last Monday, and the dispatcher who answered the call typed in the wrong address, sending fire units to an address 13 miles away. The mistake was caught about six minutes after dispatch, and it took fire units another six minutes to arrive at the correct location. By then, the house was engulfed and the occupant, Marvin Jacobs, 74, perished in the fire. Sheriff's officials said the 3-year veteran dispatcher entered the location as "Chanticleer Drive" instead of the correct location, "Shantercliff Place," despite the caller spelling out the correct street name three times during the call. They said the caller was using a Vonage-based telephone, and the address of the caller wasn't displayed to the dispatcher. An investigation is underway into the cause of the fire and the 911 call handling.

## USA Today Article Spotlights 911 Problems


A long article in the national USA Today newspaper makes a case that the nation's 911 systems are straining to handle wireless 911 calls, and that technical glitches have resulted in "many" incidents have resulted in delayed responses and deaths. The story includes references to the death of a Johns Creek (Geo.) woman, and seems to imply her death was the result of a 911 system problem. However, Fulton County officials fired a dispatcher for mishandling the incident, adding that the woman had a 2,100-page personnel file that included other mishandled incidents and discipline.

## Former Dispatcher Pleads Guilty--Accessing Computers

A former Rochester (NY) police dispatcher has pleaded guilty to illegally accessing protected computer systems, and faces up to one year in jail when she's sentenced in October. Nadire Zelanaj was fired in Dec. 2007 after police discovered that she was accessing a federal "watch list" using computer links in the comm center. Ac-

ording to police, she accessed the watch list 232 times between Jan. 2006 and Dec. 2007. There has never been any explanation of why she was accessing the watch list, or what she did with any information that she obtained.


## Pittsburgh Center Suffers Complaints, Staff Shortages

In the wake of the death of three Pittsburgh (Penn.) police officers last April, the combined city-Allegheny County comm center is struggling to stay afloat, according to a newspaper's investigation. It's difficult to retain staff, with 10 dispatchers fired this year, and another 20 to 25 leaving on their own. A 10 year-old computer system limits the information available to dispatchers. The only bright spot is that the rate of complaints filed with the comm center seems to be slightly below similarly-sized comm centers in the region. 

## Dispatchers Reach Tentative Contract Deal

Late Friday night, Calgary (Alb.) public safety dispatchers reached a tentative agreement on a new union contract, easing concerns that the workers would go on strike. Last week the dispatchers voted 9-to-1 to approve a strike if negotiations on the contract were unsuccessful. The proposed contract must now be approved by the union members.

## Groups Unite for NextGen Broadband Technology

A group of 30 public safety, education and service organizations has formed a consortium to share information and seek funding to deploy broadband technology for communications. The Next Generation Safety Consortium (NGSC) will help, "raise awareness and demonstrate the significant benefits of broadband for emergency response," the group said in a press release. Among the member groups is NENA, and its president Brian Fontes explained that broadband has "empowered millions of consumers and businesses across the county. The same revolution is needed in the world of 9-1-1 and emergency response." Several government agencies have also joined the group, including from Minnesota, Texas, Washington, Alabama, Indiana, South Dakota and Montana. As a first step, on behalf of the group NENA will submit a broadband proposal to the NTIA. 

## Company Announces Annual Award Recipients

Recording technology company NICE Systems Inc. has announced the recipients of its annual PSAP Finest Awards, recognizing individuals from coast-to-coast. The awards were announced in 2006, and are based on peer nominations for, "exemplary achievements, depth of knowledge, innovative thinking, involvement and years of service to public safety," the company says. A panel of judges from the public safety community selects the recipients. This years "Finest" are:

- Director of the Year (tie): Peter W. Meade, Assistant Fire Marshal for Fire & Rescue Services, Nassau County Fire Communications ( Mineola, NY), Steve Souder, Director, Fairfax County (Virg.) Department of 9-1-1 / Public Safety Communications
- Line Supervisor of the Year (tie): Stephanie Trueblood, Shift Supervisor, Kitsap County (Wash.) Central Communications /9-1-1; Carolyn Cornejo, Public Safety Dispatcher III, Oxnard (Calif.) Police/Fire Communications
- Technician of the Year: Rick Archuleta, Communications Technician III, Monterey County (Calif.)
- Telecommunicator of the Year: Benjamin Adams, Police Communications Technician, Columbus (Ohio) Police Department

## InterAct Scoops Up Mobile Data Products

Public safety software company InterAct Public Safety Systems announced that it has purchased the law enforcement division of BIO-key International (NJ), a company providing mobile data applications for public safety agencies. The \$11 million purchase will make InterAct the largest public safety software company in the country, the company claims, with over 2,000 customers on three continents. InterAct signed an agreement in 1999 to integrate and market BIO-key's mobile applications with its own CAD, RMS and other software, including MobileCop, PocketCop, MobileRescue and MobileOffice. Under the new purchase, the BIO-key division will become InterAct911 Mobile Systems Inc., and could be finalized by year's end. InterAct has posted a Web page explaining how the purchase will affect customers of the two companies here.

## APCO Conference Spotlights Award Recipients

The annual conference of the Association of Public Safety Communications Officials (APCO) begins on Monday in Las Vegas, and will spotlight the group's annual award recipients for "the highest levels of personal and professional conduct and performance in the line

of duty.” Coincidentally, with over 5,000 PSAPs in the country, two of the recipients are from the same agency—the Grays Harbor (Wash.) Communications E9-1-1 center. Loanne Travess will receive the Telecommunicator of the Year award during the conference, and Scott Sipe will be named Technologist of the Year. The awards are particularly noteworthy, since just two years ago a county investigation of a missing person incident uncovered serious management, policy and chain of command issues at the center. According to a 528-page report, the missing woman from Beaverton (Ore.) was reported as a DUI driver, but was not located until 11 days later, when her car and body were found on a rural forestry road. The investigation found that dispatchers properly handled the incident, and no one was disciplined. The victim’s husband filed a lawsuit last Dec. against the city of Beaverton, state of Oregon and Grays Harbor County alleging negligence in handling the incident. ☞

## NENA to FCC: Let’s Get Going on Spectrum

The National Emergency Number Association (NENA) has written a letter to FCC chair Julius Genachowski, welcoming him to the job, recapping the D Block spectrum issues, and giving them guidelines on how to evaluate proposals to allocate the 700 MHz frequencies. An auction of the spectrum failed to attract sufficiently-high bids last year, leaving the 10 MHz completely unused. NENA told Genachowski, “each proposal should be weighed in terms of the proposal’s ability to provide a nationwide wireless broadband network that public safety can utilize,” and Congress should address the funding needs of public safety. The association also said waiver grants must, “ensure that technology choice, interoperability and roaming are sufficiently addressed.” The FCC is still assessing whether to re-auction the D Block or assign it some other way. ☞

## 911 Call, Then Murder-Suicide

A Columbus (Ohio) man set in motion plans to murder his girlfriend, torch his house and then hers, and then shoot himself. Police say Edward Offord II, 39, dialed 911 before turning the gun on himself to confess to everything he had already done, spelling out street names, repeating information and sounding completely unemotional about the entire situation. Police say Krista Winger was already dead when Offord talked to a dispatcher, and was calling from a rural Delaware County reservoir. He said he shot Winger at his house, set the residence on fire, then drove to Winger’s house and set it afire. It’s not clear how soon after that call that Offord killed himself. ☞ ☹

## Police Dispatcher Charged With Rape

A 20-year veteran Streator (Ill.) police dispatcher has been arrested in Wisconsin, in connection with the sexual assault of a 14 year-old boy. Kevin L. Yuhas, 42, is also a former police officer, and was arrested by a sheriff’s detective after hospital staff called police to report the youth was in the emergency room and reported being assaulted. Juneau County sheriff’s officials say the boy claims that during a visit to Yuhas’ summer home next to his, Yuhas gave him alcohol and raped him. Back in Streator, city officials say Yuhas’ job status is unchanged, since he’s still in custody. However, city manager Paul Nicholson said if he makes bail and returns to work in Illinois, he would have to report to the police chief to “discuss his arrest,” and the chief would then make a decision on what action to take. ☞

## 911 Captures Frightened Voice of Burglary Victim

A woman in Livingston County (Mich.) woman was having an ordinary day, when at 3 p.m. two men drove up in a pick-up truck and parked in her driveway. Anticipating trouble, she grabbed a cordless and cellular and dialed 911 for help, reaching Central Dispatch dispatcher Kristi Pace, who began a four-minute connection with the woman as the two men broke into the home and searched every inch for valuables. The victim hid in the upstairs bathroom, and relayed information to Pace, who informed responding officers of the suspects’ location. Police found the truck idling in the driveway, and arrested one suspect inside the house. The second suspect fled into a nearby woods and evaded a search with canine units. ☞ ☹

## Strike Vote Reportedly Was 90% ‘Yes’

Dispatchers at the Calgary (Alb.) 911 center who have been working without a contract since January reportedly voted 90 percent “Yes” to authorize a strike, giving 72 hours notice to the city if negotiations aren’t successful. The city, in return, has begun to train 100 police officers how to perform the duties of dispatching if the workers walk out. Officials of both sides say that talks are scheduled, and they are confident that an agreement can be reached before a strike. The dispatchers are classified as “non-essential,” which legally allows them to strike. They are represented by the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers. ☞

## In-Person EMD Brings Life Back to Victim

Members of the View Ridge Community Church in Everett (Wash.) were listening to thank-you talk from Gloria Savinski. The day before, church members had helped her brother, suffering from Lou Gehrig's disease, do household chores, repairs and clean-up. But then Savinski collapsed from a heart attack. Jumping up from her seat, Jackie Davis brought her experience and training into play immediately--she's an EMD-trained dispatcher at SNOPAC 911. She began giving instructions to the church members--dial 911, begin chest compressions, give rescue breathing. She recalled to a reporter, "It was like I was reading our flip chart at work. I was barking like Ms. Bossy." EMS units arrived within 4-1/2 minutes and Savinski was taken to a hospital. ☞

## 100 Hours of Overtime--Safety Hazard?

Members of the Hamilton County (Tenn.) council are questioning time cards submitted by dispatchers, indicating that several went over the 20-hour per-week limit set by the agency, and in one case totaling 100 hours in a single week. In one July week, 26 employees put in 496 hours of overtime, and in another week they worked 366 hours. County council member Deborah Scott told a reporter, "If it becomes an unsafe situation, we have to worry." John Steurmer, executive director of the comm center, said dispatchers who went over 20 hours in a week had violated policy, and admitted the incidences had "slipped through." He explained that the city and county just merged their separate center's and that training is on-going. The center has 125 employees, and 13 positions are vacant, Steurmer said. He also pointed to a specific policy--overtime is granted for work beyond eight hours in a single day, not time over 40 hours in a single work-week. "They're taking advantage of that," he said. ☞

## Dispatchers In Midst of Strike Vote

About 200 dispatchers for Calgary (Alb.) are voting whether to authorize a strike, after their union and the city have been unable to reach an agreement on a new contract. The dispatchers have been working since last January without a contract. City officials said they've made contingency plans if the dispatchers walk out. Union business manager John Briegel told a reporter that the next contract talks are scheduled for Aug. 12-14, and that he's optimistic an agreement can be made.

## Discipline Decided for E-Mail Incident

Grand Prairie (Tex.) police chief Glen Hill has decided on discipline for four employees who received and

forwarded e-mail that contained racist comments about President Obama. Public Safety Communications dispatcher Debra Willis was suspended for 28 days without pay, and police officers Tommy Hendrick, Mark Calvert and Michael Diaz were suspended for 21 days without pay. In a statement, Hill said Willis sent two e-mails and the officers each sent one, but he did not describe the content of the e-mail. He said they have all apologized for violating the city's policy on sending offensive and inappropriate e-mail. "In each case these employees have had exemplary careers of service," Hill said in the statement. "It is unfortunate that in a thoughtless moment they have blemished those careers and upset members of our community."

## Cellular Jamming Bill Requires No Notification

A U.S. Senate committee has approved a bill that would allow prison officials to apply for waivers to FCC rules that prohibit jamming of radio communications, allowing them to render smuggled cellular phones inoperative inside their facilities. However, the Safe Prisons Communications Act of 2009 provides no notification of the waiver request to public safety agencies so they might object. The bill does say the FCC, "shall consider, among other factors, whether the grant of the waiver would interfere with 19 emergency or public safety communications." Prison officials across the country say prisoners are using thousands of smuggled cellular phones to communicate among themselves, raising safety issues within the facilities. Prisoners are also using the phones to continue their criminal enterprises on the outside. The jamming authority would be the first allowable under FCC rules--although it's believed the Secret Service and the military also perform such electronic activity in the U.S. The bill now goes to the full Senate, and a companion bill is being considered by the House. ☞

## Alerting Company Sues Twitter Over Patents

A company that sells emergency alerting solutions has sued Internet company Twitter in federal court, claiming the company's 140-character messaging methodology violates three of the company's patents. TechRadium markets the IRIS alerting system to government, military and educational customers, allowing them to broadcast messages to cellular phones, pagers, smart-phones telephones or fax machines. The lawsuit targets the ability of Twitter users to send a single message, and to have that message received by many other people--exactly the type of communications covered in its patents, TechRadium states. ☞

## Mayor's 911 Call Creates Controversy

When Akron (Ohio) mayor Don Plusquellic dialed 911 to report someone injured from a sidewalk fight, he expected a dispatcher to answer immediately. Instead, he heard a recording that told him to stay on the line. After three more calls, he reached a dispatcher, and eventually talked to a comm center sergeant, telling him, "This stuff that somebody calls and there's no answer and a recording has got to stop." He told the sergeant to, "Get everything in order so you can report to (Chief) Gilbride" tomorrow morning." The calls and his behavior when officers arrived has sparked criticism from the police officer's union, who says the mayor overstepped his authority at the scene. Comm center director George Romanoski says officers arrived within 3 minutes of the first 911 call. As for 911 calls going to a queue, he said that 15 of the comm center's 65 positions are unfilled (23%), and the budget doesn't allow hiring right now. 📻



## APCO Responds to 'Negative Stories'

The Association of Public Safety Communications Officials (APCO) has issued an e-mail "Alert" to its members saying it wants to reiterate its support "for the life-saving work of 9-1-1 call takers and dispatchers," in the face of recent negative stories. Without explaining which incidents or criticism is involved, APCO president Chris Fischer said that in a "perfect world," dispatchers can determine a caller's exact location, and emergency units arrive immediately. "Although the system works seamlessly thousands of times a day, the public is generally unaware of the numerous people, the complicated networks, the policies and procedures and the technological struggles that are involved in each and every call," she added. 📻

## 800 MHz Re-Tuning Project Shows 'Strong Progress'

In a report to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), cellular carrier Sprint Nextel said that it continues to make "strong progress" on the second phase of a massive project to retune public safety agencies which use the 800 MHz band for radio communications. Just seven regions remain incomplete for Phase I retuning, the company said, "significant" progress is being made on Canadian border area retuning, and over 40% of non-border agencies have completely retuned. The states of Wyoming and South Dakota are the first to finish retuning all public safety 800 MHz users, and Utah's state-wide radio system is one of the largest systems to complete retuning. The project was initiated in 2004 by the FCC after a bold suggestion by Nextel co-founder

Morgan O'Brien, and is intended to separate cellular and public safety 800 MHz frequency assignments, helping to prevent interference. 📻

## FCC Finds Some States Raid 911 Fees

In a report requested by Congress, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) says their survey of states found 27 that are using the 911 surcharges and fees they collect only for 911-related purposes, but also found 12 states that allow the funds to be used for other programs. The FCC also learned that seven states cannot confirm how 911 funds are spent, "because they do not have oversight in the matter." The survey covered each state, the District of Columbia and most territories, and includes state and county-collected fees. 📻

## Former Victim Is Now a Dispatcher

For Kenosha (Wisc.) dispatcher Rebecca Rydzenski, it's all personal. Several years ago when she worked at a gas station, she was held up with a knife. The event transformed her, and now when 911 calls come in, she knows the fear. It was Rydzenski who answered the call from a fast-food restaurant last week reporting a robbery and fatal shooting. She knew that type of call was a possibility, she told a reporter. "I wasn't surprised. I just hoped it wouldn't happen," she said. 📻 Listen (mp3) to the 911 she handled here.

## Former Dispatcher Pleads Guilty--Theft

A former Napa (N. Calif.) police dispatcher who told fellow dispatchers that she had cancer and fraudulently collected thousands of dollars in donations has now pleaded guilty to one county of grand theft. Dannille Vanderpool was facing 13 felony counts that could have landed her in prison for several years. Instead, the day before her preliminary hearing she accepted a plea bargain that will lead to 180 days in jail. According to the Napa County district attorney, Vanderpool spread information that she had cancer, and collected up to \$50,000 from fund raising events and donations from public safety employees and citizens across the county. In fact, she has never been diagnosed with cancer, the DA said. The fraud was committed over three years. Vanderpool joined Napa PD's comm center in Jan. 2005 and resigned last January.

## TV Report Spotlights Gossip, Misconduct

The dispatchers at Washington's (DC) Office of Unified Communications bad-mouth officers while on-duty, gossip on the telephone and ignore radio requests for as-

sistance, according to a major investigation by a local TV station. According to Fox affiliate WTTG, the District's Fraternal Order of Police has filed complaints, and some dispatchers have been disciplined, but the behavior continues, potentially risking the lives of officers. The TV report lays out several incidents where dispatchers conducted personal and gossipy telephone calls, while telling radio units, "You're on stand-by." In other cases, the dispatchers talked on the phone, and then gave field units incomplete or incorrect address and other information. After the TV report, DC mayor Adrian Fenty defended comm center director Janice Quintana, saying she has brought reform to the center, while admitting that the center, "has a long way to go." 📧

## Discipline 'Way Off' For Dispatcher's Second Mistake

The family of a woman who died of a medical problem believes that a written reprimand for the Aurora (Colo.) dispatcher who mishandled the 911 call is inappropriate, especially considering that Jeanette Price mishandled a 911 call in 2001 that ended with a kidnapping and murder. "I think that's way off," said Robert Loman, whose mother Sandra died last May after Price sent emergency units to the wrong location, and tripling the response time. In the earlier incident, Price argued with a caller reporting what appeared to be the abduction of a woman from a parking lot by a man. Price told the caller at one point, "So they may have just been playing around." The abduction was real, and the victim was found dead the next day at the hands of her boyfriend. The city settled a lawsuit with a \$150,000 payment, and Price received a written reprimand. City attorney Charlie Richardson defended the latest discipline, saying Price had correctly handled "thousands" of 911 calls since the original incident. 📧

## Fed Study Find Communications Vulnerabilities

In response to a request from the Congress, the federal Government Accountability office (GAO) has issued a report on the continuity of emergency communications during a disaster, saying there is limited collaboration among federal agencies to create robust systems, limited capacity during disasters and little interoperability. There are a number of federal agencies that provide assistance to localities to mitigate vulnerabilities, the GAO said, but don't have a unified approach with that help. The GAO made four recommendations to the Congress, mostly focused on administrative efforts. 📧

## Concerned Citizen's 911 Call Begins the Debate

A Cambridge (Mass.) citizen who saw something suspicious, and who believed she ought to become involved was how a national debate began over law enforcement, race, President Obama and the two men at the center of the incident. The incident lifted Prof. Henry Gates Jr. and Sgt. James Crowley into a national spotlight, after Gates admittedly became irate when confronted by Crowley inside his home, and then was arrested for disorderly conduct. As it turned out, what neighbor Lucia Whalen saw was Gates and a limo driver trying to force the stuck door to Gates' own home. But she only knew that two men were using their shoulders against the door of a nearby house. She dialed 911 and answered the unnamed dispatcher's questions. Later, every word of the call would be played to the world from the logging tape, and studied by those who wondered if there was a hint of racism in Whalen's voice or words. The logging tape of the CPD radio transmissions was also scrutinized. In the days after the call, Whalen was vilified on Internet blogs, mistakenly accused of racism for assuming two black men could only be burglars, and the President weighed in by saying the police "acted stupidly" to arrest Crowley. At the core, the incident demonstrates how routine questions asked by a calltaker about race can become part of a large national experience. 📧

## 911 Director Resigns After Dispatcher Drug Case

The director of the Hancock County (Ind.) 911 center resigned after an investigation determined that he allowed a dispatcher trainee suspected of having drugs in his truck outside the comm center to remain on-duty. The unnamed dispatcher was later fired, and now county commissioners say Ty Wooten should have taken the dispatcher out of the comm center and immediately begun an investigation. Instead, Wooten said the trainee was only observing, had no contact with the public, and "was no imminent threat." County commission president Derek Towle said Wooten should also have passed information about the incident up the chain of command. Interestingly, the sheriff's office brought no charges against the dispatcher after a co-worker noticed an odor from the trainee's truck in the parking lot, and a sheriff's canine alerted to the presence of drugs in the vehicle. Wooten had been 911 director for the past year, and was previously a county firefighter/EMT, county comm center sergeant and manager of the Indianapolis airport comm center. 📧