

COUNTY OF ERIE
OFFICE OF COUNTY
EXECUTIVE



Barry Grossman
COUNTY EXECUTIVE

Public Safety Newsletter
February/March 2011

With the hiring of Todd Geers as Director of Public Safety, the 911 Center has stabilized operations in a monumental way that has impacted not only the 911 Center and day to day operations, but many other agencies as well. Additional staffing in the Communications and Information Technology (IT) Departments, along with additional training, has also played a significant role in benefitting not only the Safety Center, but all Erie County residents. This newsletter is again an opportunity to share with you the on-going proactive steps being taken to keep Erie County citizens safe. Kudos to Director Todd Geers and his staff at the 911 Center for all the hard work and dedication that has been shown which I am confident will continue well into the future.



Barry Grossman, County Executive

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County Executive

Jerry Mifsud
Director of Administration

Todd Geers
Director of Public Safety

Dale Robinson
Emergency Management Coordinator

John Grappy
911 Coordinator

Abdul Osman
Chief Information Officer

Six months ago I reported for duty as the Director of Public Safety. Today I am extremely pleased to share with you the numerous improvements effected in operations, training, personnel management, and technology to enhance our public safety response.

The citizens of Erie County should be proud of the facility, equipment, and personnel which comprise the community's public safety organization. This facility is ultra modern and not to be found but in a few locations in the US. When I meet with 9-1-1 vendors, once they learn of all we have here, those vendors immediately want to partner with us because they know the collection of assets we have is unparalleled. Who doesn't want to partner with the best?!

One of the first things I did was to articulate the vision, mission, and value statements to guide us into the future: short-term to fix operational deficiencies and long-term to serve as a road map for steady, on-going progress.

Our Vision: A safe community for all

Our Mission: To serve as an omnipresent lifeline for our community

Our Values: Integrity * Respect * Professionalism * Teamwork

As you are well aware, our past performance in 9-1-1 call-taking and agency dispatching was not reported favorably in the press. Were the news articles right? Why did this happen? What changes improve performance? A simple yes or no is insufficient due to the interconnectedness of systems and processes which affect and impact even a simple task.



Todd R. Geers, Director of Public Safety

Photo courtesy of Jack Hanrahan
Erie Times News

How It Works.....

Let's study a typical call-for-service to examine the interconnected components. A resident of Girard calls in a medical emergency. Our call-taker ("9-1-1 Operator") interrogates the caller, asking questions to verify the address of the incident and the caller's name and phone number (necessary in case the call is dropped so we can call the person back). Since medical emergencies for Girard are dispatched by West County Communications, the Girard caller is conferenced and transferred to West County. At that time a call-taker at West County interrogates the caller all over to determine the nature of the call so the proper emergency response can be dispatched. From the citizen's point of view, this double interrogation is frustrating and a delay in response. That is understandable and correct, yet necessary when two dispatch centers co-exist. What if our computer-aided dispatch (CAD) system were not properly configured to recognize the address as being in Girard? What if this call originated in Erie and the CAD response recommendation was not built properly? What if this call were sent from the call-taker's CAD position to the fire dispatcher's CAD position while the fire dispatcher was handling an incident such as the December fire in Union City?



As you can see, and I could go on and on with scenarios and examples, our processes are complex due to the many components involved. When a citizen comments about the delay in service, a simple fix is not always so simple. The entire process must be examined to determine where in fact does the real problem lie. As for the examples cited, we have examined and improved each one of those!



Improvement of operations and procedures requires a detailed examination of step-by-step processes to identify areas for correction. We constantly examine our processes, eager to identify ways to improve our services. Standardization of dispatch procedures is one way to improve services. Currently we dispatch 17 fire departments. If each department wants to be dispatched in their own manner, how confusing would that be for our fire dispatchers to have to remember, "Ok, this call goes to ABC Department and they want us to do this or that on the radio." To create a one-dispatch model, we invited all the police and fire chiefs to populate working groups to create a standardized radio dispatch

manual for county-wide use. I am happy to report both police and fire radio manuals are complete and we are days away from starting the training process to instruct our dispatchers and agencies on the new standardized model.

Internal standardization is critical to success as well. We are in the process of writing a new Operations Manual to memorialize all procedures and processes in one document, and a new Administrative Manual. The following is a partial list of systems in which process improvement techniques were applied:

- Training of new Telecommunicators to include creating distinct training academies for call-takers, police dispatchers, and fire dispatchers

- Training materials
- Configuration of dispatch center
- Administrative documents
- Payroll documentation
- Realignment of Shift Commander duties
- Interface with secondary agencies
- Building security
- Equipment maintenance
- Budget analysis
- Counseling & discipline
- Quality assurance reviews
- Technology, to include a new back-up dispatch center, WebCAD Internet portals for user agencies, and finalizing the implementation of the Record Management System for police agencies
- Information sharing with user agencies

Redundancy in public safety is not a nice-to-have, rather it is a necessity. Duality in systems is essential to providing 24/7 operations. Every system we have here is supplemented by a redundant system. What if something catastrophic happens to this beautiful building, where is our needed redundancy then? We are in the process of creating a 5-console, back-up dispatch center in the county-owned, Maritime Museum building. We will have full functionality of all systems for continued long-term operations. Also, ever mindful of saving money, the cost to create that facility is exceptionally low for the features it provides. We are almost finished with the build-out and have spent about \$12,000 so far. Not bad for a full back-up facility!



Exciting new initiatives are in-work or soon will be. My predecessors successfully secured a \$1.3M federal grant to implement a 900 MHz data radio system for Erie and Millcreek. Data radio refers to pushing public safety information to computers in police cruisers and fire apparatus. The physics of the frequency spectrum at 900 MHz offers the advantage of transmitting streaming video or other broadband data needs, yet the disadvantage of a small radiation footprint from each antenna array. So, \$1.3M will buy 24 antennas, each one radiating no more than 1 - 2 miles; therefore, \$1.3M will only cover Erie and about half of Millcreek! Changing to 800 MHz will allow county-wide propagation using 6 antenna sites, with enough money left over to buy a vehicular computer and modem for every police cruiser in the county (even for agencies we do not currently dispatch for), and enough money to lay fiber optic back-haul to our entire county antenna infrastructure (think public safety redundancy)! I am awaiting permission from the federal government to modify the grant to 800 MHz. Exciting, isn't it?!

The next new project is to create a common radio system for Erie County. Currently we dispatch on HF, VHF, and UHF frequencies. Using three frequencies does not easily allow for interoperability among user agencies. My goal is to identify the right frequency and system design for Erie County and find funding sources to effect the plan.



The Department of Public Safety takes great pride in the services we provide citizens and our user agencies. Vigilantly standing watch, constantly improving our processes and systems, and mindfully safeguarding taxpayers' money are duties entrusted to us. As we work toward fulfilling the vision of county-wide consolidation, we will do so at a measured pace to ensure all our stakeholders' concerns are addressed, that we offer our services freely, and that we continually strive to elevate our level of service.



F.Y.I.

Just in case you were wondering, the Public Safety Newsletter will now be published on a bi-monthly basis. Look for the next newsletter in June, 2011!!!!



Accolades from the EMS Community!



Brian Mankowski



On 11 February 2011 a call was received reporting an elderly female was unconscious, not breathing, cold to the touch, and possibly suffering cardiac arrest. In a calm, professional manner, Telecommunicator Brian Mankowski provided CPR instructions to the caller. Shortly thereafter, the patient began regurgitating. Brian provided instructions on clearing the airway, then continued encouraging CPR. At the conclusion of the call, the patient was alive and being transported by ambulance to a hospital.

On 16 February 2011, Huntington Bank on State Street reported a robbery. Telecommunicator Jennifer Maloney took the initial call from the bank and sent the call to the police dispatcher in 23 seconds! Telecommunicator Lou DePonceau took another 9-1-1 call pertaining to the bank robbery and a minute later the center received a call from the bank's alarm company. Telecommunicators James Allen, Martha Klemp, and Ben Cardot were assigned duties as police dispatchers that morning. The entire team worked flawlessly gathering information and relaying to Erie police officers. Within four minutes of the initial call, the suspect was apprehended.



Telecommunicators: Jennifer Maloney, Lou DePonceau, James Allen, Martha Klemp, and Ben Cardot



Richard Pottorf

On 22 February 2011, a call was received reporting a home invasion. Telecommunicator Richard Pottorf entered the call into CAD and notified the Erie police dispatcher within 38 seconds! Rich stayed on the line, gathering additional information, reassuring the caller that police were enroute, and even asking the caller to lower their voices and remain out of sight. Within 8 seconds of receiving the call from Rich, Telecommunicators Nathan Leroy and Brian Wisniewski dispatched Erie police units to the scene, resulting in the suspect being apprehended within 5 minutes of the initial call.



Telecommunicators Nathan Leroy and Brian Wisniewski

Exceptional call-taking and expeditious dispatching resulted in timely apprehensions and a saved life. Your professionalism and teamwork brought great credit upon yourselves and upheld the highest traditions of the Erie County Department of Public Safety.
