

# Edmond Central Communications:

| SHERRY L. BARANEK, SENIOR EDITOR

Cutting-edge technology combined with dependable employees put this call center on the map—deftly handling its responsibilities in times of crisis.

**E**DMOND CENTRAL COMMUNICATIONS (Edmond, OK)—selected as the 2003 Oklahoma Communications Center of the Year by the Oklahoma State Law Enforcement Communications Association at the state's annual Public Safety conference—was established in 1989 by consolidating police and fire/rescue communications units. Twenty-one devoted employees provide E9-1-1 service over a one hundred square mile area.

Combined with Edmond's Emergency Operations Center (EOC), Edmond Central Communications occupies approximately 5,400 square feet in the basement of the municipal court building. According to Communications Supervisor Lisa Sutterfield, the facility also serves as the central answering point for after hours, weekends and holiday public works calls for service. This award-winning facility also has turned out some award-winning employees.

"In 2001, director David Barnes was selected as the winner of Association of Public Communications Officers' (APCO's) Center Director of the Year," Sutterfield notes. "David was instrumental in helping implement the new state-of-the-art CAD system and 800 MHZ radio communications system that has improved the communications department's ability to serve residents. In September of 2003, Christie Jaggi—one of Edmond's communications specialists—was a top three finalist for 9-1-1 equip-

ment vendor Tel-Control, Inc.'s (Huntsville, AL) Dispatcher of the Year. This honor was due to her data collection of pay scales from other Oklahoma agencies comparable to Edmond's population and perseverance (in preparing a thorough document for the human resources department that showed the need for equitable compensation for communications specialists). This resulted in an 8.8 to 9.0 percent pay raise for Edmond's Central Communications specialists."

## Doing Their Duty

Sutterfield explains that Edmond Central Communications is comprised of fourteen communications specialists that work five, eight-hour days per week. These communications specialists include three shift leaders, one communications supervisor, one information and alarm specialist (responsible for NCIC validations, administration of the city of Edmond's False Alarm Ordinance, administration of the Business Identifi-

fication (BID) Program, and compliance with open records requests from the public) and two communications systems specialists. These two specialists are responsible for the communications 9-1-1 network, CAD, SunPro (fire records management), E\*Justice (police records management), Packet Cluster (mobile data and associated laptop computers), automatic vehicle location (AVL), paging, communications center workstations, Motorola 800 MHZ radio system and the servers and connectivity that allows these multiple systems to communicate with each other. Additionally, one telephone administrator oversees and coordinates all issues related with the city telephone switch and other telephone systems in use within the city of Edmond.

Back in 1996, a capital improvement sales tax allowed for a complete center renovation. "The \$6.8 million project included a Motorola two-site simulcast 800 MHZ radio system, mobile data (laptops) in PD and FD vehicles, AVL, PD records management system, FD records management system and CAD," Sutterfield notes. "This project was selected as the number-one priority by a citizen committee charged with coordinating many capital improvement projects for the city of Edmond."

Today, Sutterfield says that Edmond is fortunate to have most of the cutting-edge technology available. To carry out their

## LESSONS LEARNED

In March 2001, two prison escapees broke into an Edmond home and took two elderly residents hostage. Then, in June, 2001 an individual went on a shooting spree—killing one resident and seriously injuring another. Sutterfield recalls, "The dispatchers had the first contact on the phone with both the prisoners and hostages during the first crisis. During the shooting spree, the dispatchers were barraged with 9-1-1 calls from frantic neighbors witnessing the ordeal. Both of these emotionally charged calls left the on-duty communications specialists with frayed nerves and sleepless nights. We found that including our dispatch staff during debriefing meetings greatly assisted in relieving stress and pent-up emotions."



Information and Alarm Specialist Tad Mayo is making adjustments to BID (Business Identification) files in the Tri-Tech CAD system.

Photos courtesy of Edmond Central Communications.

## The Association of Central Oklahoma Governments (ACOG)

ACOG—a voluntary association of city, town and county governments within the Central Oklahoma area—was instrumental in developing and implementing the E9-1-1 emergency telephone number and system in the Oklahoma City metropolitan area. According to Edmond Central Communications supervisor Lisa Sutterfield, this highly advanced system incorporates regional sites where calls are answered and covers a wide area of communities and counties, as well as an Air Force base in the Central Oklahoma region. The 9-1-1 Association of Central Oklahoma Governments (9-1-1 ACOG)—an operational arm of ACOG—was formed to implement and manage the system for suburban communities.

duties, the employees use Tel-Control, Inc.'s InVision 2 9-1-1 workstations and San Diego, CA-based TriTech's CAD system. "The 800 MHZ radio system uses Motorola Centracom Gold Elite Series consoles and approximately six hundred individual subscriber units," Sutterfield notes.

Sutterfield elaborates on Edmond's 9-1-1 system. "Besides providing basic ALI/ANI information on the 9-1-1 screen, the InVision workstation also allows for automatic transfers to other agencies with the click of the mouse button or accessing the touch screen," she explains. "The recall feature allows for instantaneous playback of a 9-1-1 call. Each call taker logs into their 9-1-1 station using their own private password and their call activity can be tracked. The InfoVison portion of the InVision 911 system provides our call center with complete control over our database by allowing us to query and view data any way we choose.

"For record keeping purposes, calls can be tracked on a daily, monthly or yearly basis," Sutterfield continues. "One other major benefit of the 9-1-1 system is that twenty-one other metro agencies in our area use this same system. Coordinated by the Association of Central Oklahoma Governments (see ACOG sidebar), this allows for greater levels of interoperability and continuity of operation."

### Exemplary Employees

Over the years, the Edmond Communications Center has had to face staffing challenges and lack of adequate space. Sutterfield points out that the center's renovation has alleviated the spacing problem somewhat at the present time, while staffing shortages continue to challenge centers for her department as well as other agencies in the country. David Barnes—the director of the center—expands on these sentiments. "It is difficult to find dedicated employees who select telecommunications as a career—not just a job or stepping stone. Often the limited upward mobility prevents career growth into supervisory positions."

Presently, Sutterfield says that consistent training is their number-one concern, which they are meeting head-on. "We plan to implement a training officer position," she says. "This person will be responsible for all aspects of the training program, continued education training for comm specialists and provide a more structured plan for new hires."

To keep Edmond's employees current with the latest in 9-1-1 technology, the facility has in-house system techs for internal training on the 800 MHZ radios and CAD system. "During 2004, we are fortunate to host a variety of telecommunicator courses—including 9-1-1 liability and a Communications Training Officer class," Sutterfield states. Additionally, Edmond communications specialists attend various conferences around the country and share their knowledge on the latest in communications technology.

As for keeping its current employees happy, Sutterfield notes the benefits program is "excellent" and they strive to recognize individual accomplishments. "Each year a Communicator of the Year award is given to a communications specialist who has displayed extraordinary performance," she states. "The recipient of this prestigious award is determined by their co-workers." Barnes adds, "Our strengths lie in our ability to set ourselves aside in favor of the needs of others."

### SUPERVISOR TALK

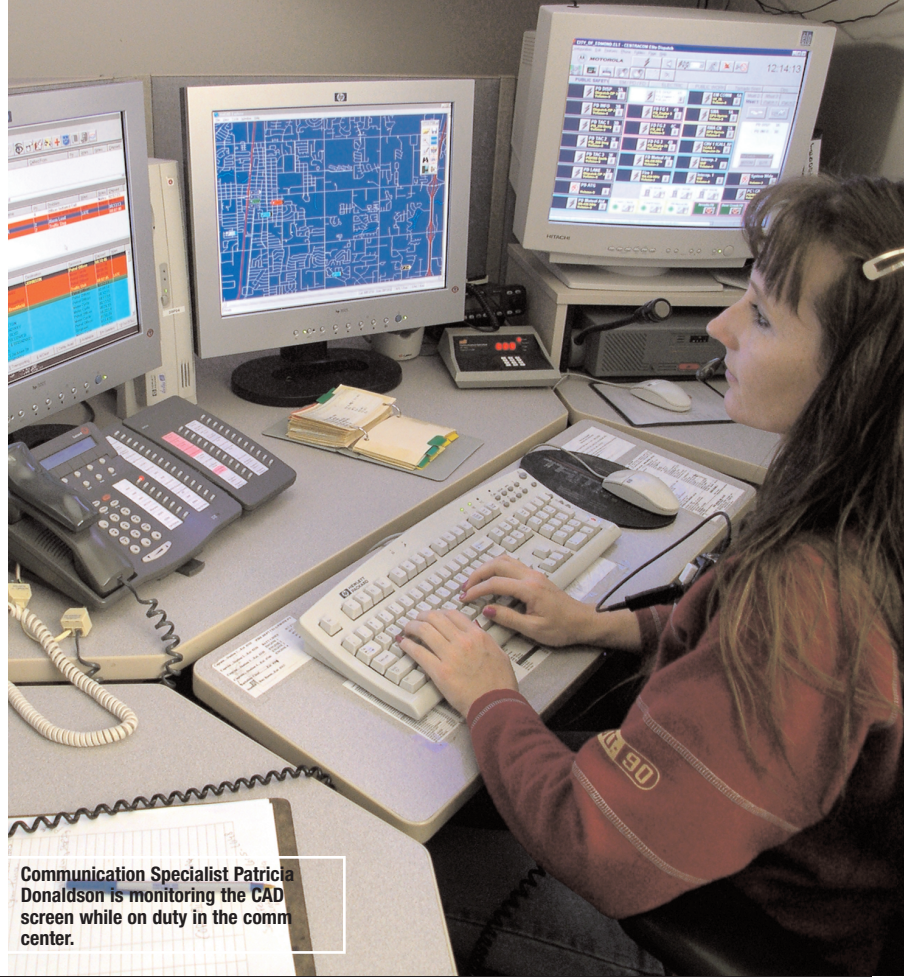
"Never lose touch with your employees or hands-on operations. One thing I've found to be true: If you don't use it, you lose it. I will purposely sit down and answer calls and interact with the dispatch staff in the comm center. If a disaster happens, I want to be able to go in, lend a hand and be of assistance to the dispatch staff."— Lisa Sutterfield

The facility also strives to acknowledge an individual's integrity. "The city of Edmond subscribes to a monthly character trait publication titled Character First—an Oklahoma City-based company that helps develop good character," she says. "Employees are encouraged to do what is right, according to the highest standards of behavior in every situation. It has been a successful program for city employees."

When needed, Edmond Central Communications posts job opening flyers on the University of Central Oklahoma campus, which has resulted in several criminal justice students working in the center. "Newspapers and trade magazines also have been beneficial in attracting potential employees," Sutterfield adds.

Down the road, Edmond Central Communications hopes to expand once again. "A new municipal complex that will begin construction this year also brings the possibility of a new communications center," Sutterfield states. "Continued growth in Edmond brings the potential of a bigger center for emergency services for a growing community." **ENPM**

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Communication Specialist Patricia Donaldson is monitoring the CAD screen while on duty in the comm center.



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