

State 911 Administration Office Newsletter

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Dear Telecommunicator,

We are over the halfway mark in 2020. The sunshine has been wonderful; however, someone needs to remind mother nature we do not need all our rain for the month in the span of a couple of days. With the high heat and low precipitation, many areas around the state have burn bans in place to help protect their first responders. Does your agency have a way of tracking this, or do you leave these decisions to your local fire departments?

Do not forget the newsletter link will now be found within MiSNAP. If you are having issues accessing MiSNAP, please email our office at sncdispatchertraining@michigan.gov. Theresa or Lyndsay will be happy to help make sure you have access and are able to benefit from the new portal.

If you would like to be added to the mailing list, please reach out by sending an email to stephensl5@michigan.gov.

As always, if you have any questions or concerns, please contact the State 911 Office staff and we will do our best to ensure you receive the information you are seeking.

Warm Regards,

Your Friends at the State 911 Office

Upcoming Events*

*See the website for meeting times and locations.

August 3, 2020

Emerging Technology
Subcommittee Meeting

August 19, 2020

911 Training Subcommittee
Meeting

August 20, 2020

Certification Subcommittee
Meeting

August 31, 2020

Legislative Action
Subcommittee Meeting

September 9, 2020

State 911 Committee
Meeting

September 14, 2020

Emerging Technology
Subcommittee Meeting

Legislative Action

The Legislative Action Subcommittee (LAS) plans to begin discussion at the next in person meeting on the sunset of Public Act 32 of 1986 scheduled for December 31, 2021. The next LAS meeting will be held on August 31, 2020, virtually and is open to the public. If you would like to keep informed on the process and discussions that will be taking place and stay involved in the various 911 organizations within the state, we encourage you to attend. The meeting minutes are also posted on our website at www.michigan.gov/snc under Legislative Action.

The vacant subcommittee positions have yet to be discussed. The LAS was hoping for an in-person meeting in August to discuss the applicants and suggest candidates for the LAS chair to take to the State 911 Committee Chair for recommendation, the vacant positions may be delayed until we are able to do so.

If you have any concerns or questions regarding the LAS, please contact Lyndsay Stephens and she will relay the information to the Chair of this subcommittee.

911 Training

The first phase of the automation project, the Michigan State 911 Administration Portal (MiSNAP), went live April 2, 2020. A webinar was provided to the training providers and to the PSAP directors. We are hopeful the resource page will be live in the production environment within the next week. Once this is live, you will be able to access the program manual as well as the webinar provided to members in May.

Please make sure as the PSAP Director or Training Coordinator you have gone through each of your employees to ensure their training summary is correct and up to date. If you find you have training missing, please put together a spreadsheet including the course name, course number, employee who completed the course, and the date of completion. Please do this for your entire agency as well as check to ensure the fund distribution information is correct for your agency and let Theresa and Lyndsay know this has been completed. We want to make sure we have all errors corrected before the training fund applications are made available for 2021.

If you have any questions or issues accessing MiSNAP, please email Theresa or Lyndsay at sncdispatchertraining@michigan.gov.

Certification

The State 911 Committee approved the Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP) for compliance reviews at the June meeting along with several compliance review reports. The first two compliance reviews utilizing the new phased process were approved in June, however, the site visits for phase two of those reports have not yet been scheduled due to Covid-19 restrictions. Currently the certification subcommittee is still randomly drawing 2-3

counties at each quarterly meeting, depending on how many PSAPs are in the county/service district drawn. CCE and Washtenaw County were drawn in May and are in the process of being completed now.

Emerging Technology

Unfortunately, the 2020 Emerging Technology Forum had to be cancelled. Don't be too sad, the subcommittee will begin working on bringing a great opportunity next year. Please keep September 27-29, 2021, open on your calendars. Starting in 2021, the Emerging Technology Forum (ETF) will be moved to the fall permanently. There were so many other conferences and training events held in the spring as well as National Telecommunicator Week so this will hopefully allow more people to attend. Cindy Homant will be working with the Emerging Technology subcommittee to ensure this is a great educational opportunity and as always if you have an interest in learning more about a topic or have topic suggestions for the team to consider, please submit them to either Cindy or Stacie Hansel.

If you have any questions, please contact Cindy Homant at homantc@michigan.gov or 517-284-3032 or Stacie Hansel at HanselS@michigan.gov or 517-284-3033.

911 Administrator

I would like to thank the State 911 Office, the State 911 Committee, Joel King from the Attorney General's office, and the Michigan Public Service Commission for all the hard work they have put into working with the PSAPs to provide much needed extensions for forms and training certification requirements. These are not simple tasks and I appreciate the patience and effort put into this by all. I would also like to recognize the PSAP Directors/Coordinators who have been reaching out to me and/or other members of the State 911 Office with your concerns, questions, and simply just to maintain that positive working relationship throughout the virtual meeting transition. We are here for you!

It seems we have had one major event after another this spring/summer. Throughout the roughest times, it shows how strong 911 is in Michigan that we still lean on each other, lend an ear, or give a helping hand and a kind word when needed. We use each other's strength time and again. I know that inside the walls of each 911 center from the Director down to the newest telecommunicator, you are all doing the same things for each other. Thank you for what you do. You are all amazing!

Congratulations and a huge THANK YOU to Ms. Amy Heer, Ms. Leslie Best, and Ms. Patricia Dancz for the outstanding teamwork and dedication you have shown in your 25 years!! The industry is incredibly lucky to have your wisdom and institutional knowledge to pass down for other generations of 911 telecommunicators.

Recognition Corner: Mason-Oceana 911

25 years of saving lives.



By Allison Scarbrough, Editor.

WEARE TOWNSHIP — On May 22, 1995 Amy Heer, Leslie Best and Patricia Dancz began training as the first dispatchers for Mason-Oceana 911. Twenty five years later, the dedicated trio remains on hand to serve Oceana and Mason counties’ residents during critical times — often in life-or-death situations.

Mason-Oceana 911 marks its 25-year anniversary, and the dispatch center on Oceana Drive in Weare Township opened in 2003.

Often dispatchers are forgotten when emergency first responders are acknowledged, because they operate “behind the scenes.”

“Dispatchers are the ‘first responders,’ and they very seldom get the thanks or even acknowledgment,” said Leslie. “Dispatchers are never mentioned. ”

“There can be a really dark side to this job that people don’t realize,” said Mason-Oceana 911 Director Ray Hasil. “We don’t see those things with our eyes like the other responders do. However, we’re always the very first person they talk to you when something is discovered. They hear all the screams over the phone when a mother discovers her son has committed suicide or a phone call from somebody who’s been in accident.”

“Not being able to please everyone,” is probably the most challenging aspect of the job, said Amy. “They don’t necessarily call us when things are the best in their life. And we’re the first one they have contact with. A lot of them don’t like to hear what they’re being told. Instantly I’m the bad guy. People get frustrated with you. It has an effect on you.”

The three unsung heroes did finally get the credit they deserved. They were honored for their quick actions during a helicopter crash on a cold December day in 2012 in a remote, swampy area near Walkerville. Pilot Thomas Slocum, 49, died on impact. Passenger, then 28-year-old Matt Williams, was airlifted by AeroMed to Spectrum Health in Grand Rapids. Williams miraculously survived the crash — thanks to Amy, Leslie and Pat. Their fast response got Williams the help he needed.

“Matt Williams, the survivor, has remained a loyal fan of ours,” Leslie said. “When we went for our millage, he was our most vocal supporter. He has never forgotten us.”

“He was in ‘No Man’s Land’ in a swamp,” said Pat. “He never would have survived the night. He was soaking wet. It took an hour to find him and two hours to get him out.”

“There was a lot of coordination to figure out where he was,” Amy said. “A DNR officer started trucking through the swamp and started hollering.”

The Michigan Association of Public Safety Communications Officials awarded the dispatchers the prestigious “Communications Team of the Year” award in 2013. Their plaque reads: “When a collection of brilliant minds, hearts and talents come together... Expect a masterpiece. For your team life saving efforts during the 2012 helicopter crash.”

Although that was a tough call to handle, it doesn’t compare to the call that came in a few years earlier. “It was Oct. 24, 2010,” Amy said. “It was early afternoon, and we got a call out by Silver Lake out by the dam. A couple found a gentleman down on the ground unresponsive, blue. They started CPR. It was my great idea to get a run on the vehicle and find out who this person is, so we can contact family. Kris (Kokx) ran it, and she came over and gave me a grip of death on my arm, and it was my husband and he didn’t make it.”

After hearing the tragic news, Ray came to Amy’s aid. “We’ve got a crisis up here,” Amy recalled Kris saying as she relayed the horrible news to their boss. “He rushed me to hospital,” Amy said. “It was the worst time. We’ve all had personal things that have happened.”

Pat recalled the time her husband was in an industrial accident. “Guys that you know show up knocking on the door after working all night,” she said of the officers coming to her house to relay the news after she had finished the night shift.

The stats that the threesome has logged since moving into the 911 center in 2003 are jaw-dropping. Pat has logged 34,000 911 incidents; Leslie, 38,500; and Amy, 48,000.

Ray describes Amy as “freaky fast.”

“She answers the phone before it even finishes ringing,” Pat said of her colleague.

Prior to moving into the 911 center, operations took place in the basement of the Oceana County Sheriff’s Office. The three underwent training from May through September. On Sept. 11, 1995, Mason-Oceana 911 went on the air at 9:11 p.m., said Ray.

“This is a place that started from scratch,” he said. “There was no training manual. They went through these first three months just trying to learn this job that didn’t even exist. It was baptism by fire.”

“It took us four and a half years from concept to going live to start this place,” he added.

Mason-Oceana 911 was either the first or second multi-county center in the state, said Executive Assistant Connie Blaauw.

The three dispatchers reminisced about that first shift after going online. “My radio didn’t work at all, so I thought that was wonderful,” Amy joked. “The room was packed — it was hot. It was pins and needles,” she recalled.

“I remember you wanted a survival kit,” Leslie said to Amy. “With a barf bag,” Amy quipped, recalling the tension of that first day.

Leslie said that in the early years the dispatchers had to use punch cards to track calls, a system which is now all computerized.

“It was all pre-numbered by agency,” said Amy. “You would fill out the location, caller, phone number, type of complaint — like an old time clock. We kept track of everybody’s activity on paper.”

“We would stack them in front of our consoles,” said Pat.

Leslie recalled the old days of transitioning rural route addresses to actual house numbers. Dispatchers had to literally walk around some communities to develop a mapping system with the addresses.

Cell phones have been a major game changer for 911 dispatch. “Now everybody has one,” said Amy.

There are three dispatchers on the dispatch floor from 8 a.m. to 2 a.m., said Ray. Then, there are two from 2 a.m. to 8 a.m. And then the third person comes back on.

“This job is so hot and cold,” Amy said. “It takes just one little thing and then everybody is calling. There are times when that phone just doesn’t stop, You have calls pending and you don’t have enough officers to go on them.”

They all agree that Fridays and Tuesdays are the busy days. “Crazy things happen on Tuesdays,” said Leslie. “Tuesdays statically are just as bad if not worse than a weekend day.”

As far as the high amount of stress that comes with the job, “You have to vent and let it go,” said Amy. “I think experience helps,” said Pat. “The longer you do this job, you more you know how to handle the bad stuff and how to let go of the bad stuff. I remember going home and crying and saying, ‘What I’m doing here?’ Now it stinks, but you have to let it go.”

Each of the three women has children, and their kids have experienced many holidays without their moms because they’re working to keep the community safe.

“Holidays don’t necessarily fall on holidays,” said Leslie. “Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny came whenever Mom was off.”

“You often have to cancel plans last minute,” said Pat of being called in to cover a shift.

The three dispatchers all have a sense of humor that keeps them laughing even in stressful times. Although, some of those stressful calls have a lasting impact.

They have experienced horrific calls like people calling 911 just prior to committing suicide.

“I took a call when a guy drank toilet bowl cleaner wanting to kill himself,” said Pat. “As I’m talking to him, he changes his mind and doesn’t want to die. He died on the phone with us. I literally heard his last breaths. That is probably the hardest call I ever took.”

“I heard a guy shoot himself on the phone,” said Amy. “He died when we were on the phone.”

“We don’t want to see what those things look like,” Ray said. “Your brain draws those conclusions. At least the responders have some sort of closure. For people in this field of work, it can get to you because you’re making the pictures yourself.”

“You harden, otherwise it will eat you up,” said Amy.

“What you guys do every day, you’re in charge of a scene until some public safety entity gets there,” Ray said to his dispatchers.

Pat’s quick thinking helped save an elderly woman during a massive apartment complex fire at the Parkview Manor in Hart in the middle of a frigid December night in 2016. “An elderly lady was trapped inside on the second floor, and Pat talked her through it, and she was saved,” said Ray. “Pat talks her into a bedroom and stays on the phone with her and keeps her calm.”

Meanwhile they're coordinating getting a ladder and got her out."

"You can have all the training the world, but there are so many things that you just don't have training for," Ray said. "You have to be able to — on the fly — talk people through a really hard time and keep them safe."

"Then, at the same time, other calls are coming in while you're on the phone trying to help the parties. You have to multi-task."

Amy took the call of the shooting death that occurred in Free Soil Township April 16, 2019. Corey Ryan Beekman is accused of murdering William Buchanan, 32, of Mears and wounding 32-year-old Kaitlin Buck with a gunshot to the arm. He faces charges of second-degree murder, felonious assault and two counts of felony firearms. His case has not yet gone to trial.

"She's responsible for trying to keep that person alive over the phone," said Ray. Amy stayed on the phone with Buck for an hour. "She's hiding in the closet with her two kids. That was a pretty amazing call. Fifteen minutes later, he calls to surrender, and Amy picked up that call too."

A little advice for 911 callers is to make sure you know your address, crossroad and what township or village you live in," Leslie said. It's amazing how many 911 callers do not have that information when they call for help.

"They are the lifeline for every responder," said Connie. "The amount of stress is amazing that they have dealt with over the 25 years."

Now in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, a tough job just got even harder. There is a long list of health-related questions dispatchers must ask callers if a first responder is being sent out to the scene. Some people are not cooperative about truthfully answering the questions and some become rude when they are asked.

"There has been a huge increase in domestics," said Pat.

The dispatchers have observed that people are waiting longer to call 911 now when they are truly sick. "People are waiting until the last possible second, because they are scared to go to the hospital."

The job certainly offers a lot of variety. "You never know what you're going to get when you go to work," said Pat.

"Coffee and Mountain Dew keeps this place running, and Dairy Queen keep these people happy," Ray said.

The three women have formed a sisterhood over the years. They have served as babysitter, birthing coach and godmother for each other's kids.

"You're on a 12-hour shift with each other — it's more time than you see your own family," said

Ray.

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