

# '911, WHAT IS YOUR EMERGENCY?'

/Abbie Darst, Public Information Officer

It's just before 3 a.m., and the phones in Bowling Green's modern communication center have been reasonably quiet all night. For the most part, the city outside sleeps peacefully, content in the knowledge that police, firefighters and paramedics stand ready despite the hour. It's a typical scene throughout Kentucky in the early morning hours, but this morning, it is a scene that's about to change dramatically.

Shattering the silence, an emergency phone shrills in the communication center. Telecommunicator Steve Wilson instinctively grabs the phone before the first ring is completed. His senses are immediately inundated with discordant sounds of pandemonium and chaos. Someone in the background screams, "Get up, get up please!" Calmly, professionally, Wilson asks, "911, what is your emergency?"

"LoOK, there's been an accident – a bus accident – on the highway. I don't even know where I'm at," a frazzled woman answers.

"Is anybody injured?"

"No, I'm not injured real bad," she wimpers.

"Is there anybody on the bus injured?"

"Yes, there's a lot of people on the bus injured," she cries out.

As Wilson continues on the line

with the distressed woman, he routes the information to local law enforcement and fire dispatchers, and Warren County's emergency medical service, MedCom. A tour bus carrying 66 passengers has crashed into a bridge on Interstate-65 just outside town. Within seconds Bowling Green's emergency response units have been activated and are on the way to the scene.

This one call has changed the course of Wilson's shift, and forced the Bowling Green Communication Center into high gear for the next several hours.

## True First Responders

In communication centers across Kentucky, telecommunicators handle similar situations regularly, every hour of every day, year round.

"In 15 seconds one phone call can change the rest of your day completely," said Ann Johnson, director of the Montgomery County 911 center. "You can either do [this job] or you can't. You can't be OK at this. You can be OK at sewing socks together in a factory and survive. You can't just be OK here; you've got to be able to go. You've got to be able to switch gears when something huge happens."

Life in a communication center can be compared to a never-ending rollercoaster. The ups and downs that telecommunicators experience during their eight-, 10- and sometimes 12-hour shifts fuel the tragedies and triumphs of their dichotomic careers.

Years ago, Johnson said, all the focus was on first responders as the paramedic, the firefighter, the police officer. >>

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>> “But your first contact in trying to get help are those people in [the communication center], and if that goes unanswered ... it’s really going to be devastating,” she said. “It has to start in a communication center and if you’re weak there, you’re weak everywhere.”

Fortunately, Kentucky’s nearly 1,500 full-time telecommunicators have proven that they are capable of answering the call and taking on that true first-responder role without missing a beat – but it’s not always

times. If you’re one of those people that have to know what happened, if you have to have the end result, this isn’t for you.”

Many telecommunicators identify lack of closure as one of the most difficult aspects of the job.

“I guess the hardest part is we start the process, but we never get to see the end results of it,” Pikeville Post’s Hunt said. “We never get to see when the fire department is able to put the house [fire] out and save it and it not burn down, when the ambulance

◀ Lori Ochocki, advanced dispatcher at the Bowling Green Communication Center, dispatches a 911 call. The screens in front of Ochocki are part of the center’s CAD system and displays information about where the officers in the field are, what calls they are responding to and what calls have been recently dispatched. Bowling Green’s center is set up to accommodate dispatchers in a seated or standing position. The lower level of the desk is height adjustable and tilts to allow dispatchers the option to stand and move around during their shift.

easy. As the term first responder stipulates, the telecommunicator is the first person that a victim reaches when he or she has been violated, the first one a witness talks to after an accident, the first one a business owner contacts after their has been vandalized – and the first voice that emergency responders hear dispatching them to the latest run.

“We’re one-stop shopping. We take the call, we log the call, we dispatch the call out,” said John Hunt, a 24-year telecommunicator with the Kentucky State Police Post 9 in Pikeville.

However, being the first point of contact and setting the ball in motion is as far as most telecommunicators get. Often they must continue fielding other calls on the same incident, taking new calls that are coming into the center and keeping up with the fast-pace atmosphere the communication center demands. They do not know how many of the situations they handled throughout the day turned out.

“We don’t get a lot of closure here because once we get them there, we’re done with our initial task,” Montgomery County’s Johnson said. “It’ll drive you crazy some-

gets them, making sure they’re staying alive after we’ve done emergency medical dispatch and they get them to the hospital and they still live.”

Not knowing how the story ends can also lead to a sense of helplessness said Lori Cooper, advanced dispatcher at the Bowling Green Communication Center.

“Being on this side and not being able to fix what’s on the other side, not seeing it ... you’re limited,” Cooper said. “You send the help, you get the help on the way, and then you have to sit and wait for someone else to do it.”

### Silent Heroes

But getting the help to an individual in need and remaining on the phone with the caller to offer the patient, calm reassurance that everything possible is being done to resolve his or her situation is one of the most important roles these responders play. Louisville MetroSafe call taker and dispatcher Melissa Harley knows that all too well.

In May 2002, Harley received a 911 telephone call from a woman who said she was

being held against her will by a man who had tied her up. She had been able to untie herself and said she was in a room in an auto body shop. She was able to give two cross streets, loosely identifying her location. Harley immediately dispatched the police while she continued to gather information from the victim. Harley recalls the phone becoming muffled and hearing a man’s voice. Assuming that the victim’s violator had re-entered the room and the victim had dropped her phone, Harley remained on the line. She could only listen as the victim was raped and sodomized for a fourth time. When the police arrived at the dispatched location, the building was locked up. Since it was Sunday, the officer assumed the business was closed and radioed Harley to say she could hear dogs barking, but was leaving the scene because no one was there. However, Harley could hear dogs barking in the background through the victim’s cell phone. She told the officer not to leave and that the victim was still inside being assaulted. Officers broke down the door to the auto body shop and found the victim and the assailant, who was later sentenced to 35 years in prison for sodomy, unlawful imprisonment and possession of a firearm.

Despite receiving recognition for her outstanding handling of the call and an Award of Merit from the Louisville Police Department, Harley is still haunted by the events of that afternoon.

Harley received this particular call toward the beginning of her shift that day and after a short break returned to her terminal to finish out her long shift. Like many other telecommunicators across the state, Harley has learned how to deal with difficult and emotional calls and still manage to go on with her work.

“Every day, when you come to work you worry that something’s going to happen. It’s always in the back of your mind,” she said. “You come in and you have a job to do and you do your job, whether it be an officer calling for help or something else, and you hope nothing bad will happen.”

The hardest calls of all, those that involve family members, loved ones or co-workers >>

## CRAZY CALLS

A man called wanting a bedtime story. - MetroSafe

A person called to report a stolen car found in their garage. - MetroSafe

People have called on Thanksgiving to ask how to cook a turkey. - MetroSafe

A family called to report that there was a green-eyed monster that had stolen their chickens and was chasing their uncle through the yard. - Winchester

A woman called requesting officers go get her husband from his girlfriend's house because it was time for him to come home. - Winchester

A bed-ridden woman with the "miserics" would call for an ambulance, and when they arrived she just wanted someone to get her chicken out of the fridge, turn off the air conditioner or get her a glass of water. - Winchester

A woman who had accidentally put her cat in the dryer called, and a KSP dispatcher talked her through performing CPR on the cat. - KSP Pikeville Post

A person called complaining that their neighbors were blowing heat on their house. - KSP Pikeville Post

A woman wanted to report a burglary to law enforcement, but had to drive to the communication center because she forgot the number to 911. - KSP Pikeville Post ■

>> are no different.

"You have to handle it like any other call," said Pikeville Post's Hunt. "You have to – you don't have a choice .... You just go on through it and do like you'd do any other call."

Last winter, three of Hunt's co-workers experienced a string of extreme calls that challenged how they deal with difficult situations and emotionally devastating events.

Pikeville Post telecommunicators Christy Runyon, Misty Shepherd and Melinda Thompson handled three major incidents in just seven days. On December 19, 2006, a call came into the radio room that Tpr. Jonathan Leonard had been involved in a vehicle accident. Runyon, Shepherd and Thompson immediately dispatched troopers, ambulances, fire departments and a medical helicopter toward the scene. Shortly afterward, they were responsible for notifying the coroner and informing all Post 9 personnel that Leonard had died. In the midst of dealing with the loss of a friend and co-worker, these three women fielded another 324 calls in the first two hours following the incident before they were relieved.

Six days later, on Christmas morning, KSP Det. Joey Howard was found unresponsive at his home in Pike County. These same women dispatched emergency responders to the scene and, when Howard was pronounced dead at his home, they were once again responsible for contacting Post 9 personnel to let them know another close friend and co-worker had passed away, all while still answering another 139 calls.

The next day, Tpr. B.J. Caudill was hit by a car while on the scene of an accident on U.S. 23 in Floyd County. The three telecommunicators dispatched the ambulance, fire department and other troopers to the scene. Caudill was rushed to Pikeville Medical Center. As the women dealt with their third emotional blow in a week, they continued to take 243 more calls before being relieved.

"Everything else stopped for the troopers, the supervisors, everybody going there. Everybody just focused on those officers at the

time," Hunt said. "Everything just went to a standstill on the law enforcement side, but in here, on the dispatchers, they had to still keep answering the phones, still keep doing all the other calls and the other jobs that they do, plus trying to keep up with their friend that something had happened to."

Sometimes it does get to you, said Bowling Green's Cooper, who found herself in a situation similar to these Pikeville Post telecommunicators. She was on the phone and heard the shots ring out that eventually killed Bowling Green Officer David Whitson in October 2006.

"There are times when I didn't want to come back," Cooper said. "I guess the time I really, really felt I would not come back was after Dave Whitson was shot because I was on the phone and heard the shots, and after all of that ... I said, 'I just can't do this anymore. I can't do it.' Then my husband said, 'Lori, if you don't go back, you'll never go back, and I know you love it.' He said, 'It's like riding a bicycle you've got to get back on there and you've got to do it.'"

In smaller communities where there may be only two individuals on a shift, telecommunicators are often required to work calls that hit even closer to home, said Rhonda Rogers, supervisor of the Winchester Communication Center. Winchester dispatchers Ronnie Blakemore and Jeanna Gwynne both worked calls involving their mothers, who later passed away.

Unfortunately, there is no way to escape the eventual toll that the job takes on a person, Montgomery County's Johnson explained.

"You can't, day in and day out, consistently listen to all the bad crap going on in the world and it not eventually get to you – it does," she said.

### 'Hardest job you're ever going to love to do'

Underneath it all, the thing telecommunicators say keeps them coming back is the fact that everyday they come to work they have the potential to help somebody, to save a

life, to make a difference in the communities they serve.

"There's never a routine day," Bowling Green's Cooper said. "Even a routine day is different from the day before. You really feel like you're making a difference in the lives of people. Though a call may be routine for us, it's not for the caller."

Winchester's Rogers said that it's been her experience that most telecommunicators are just regular people with big hearts and an even bigger desire to be that helping hand many people need.

"A lot of dispatchers are suckers – we're suckers for helping people," she said. "I guarantee you that you can call any dispatch center and you will find some dispatcher that's willing to give of themselves to help some-

one else."

It's that desire to help that keeps telecommunicators across the commonwealth coming back into the radio room after discouraging days and distressing nights.

"It's not only a job, it's a lifestyle," Rogers said.

Through all of the heartache and tragedy, there is a certain air of excitement that infiltrates the communication center and manifests itself in the telecommunicators, which develops these ordinary individuals into extraordinarily dedicated employees.

"I like it, I like what it does, I like the role that we play in the chain," Hunt said. "I guess it's like some of the others, we like being right in the middle in the mix of it. It doesn't matter if ... the fire department's out there,

EMS is out, police departments – we're right in the middle of it."

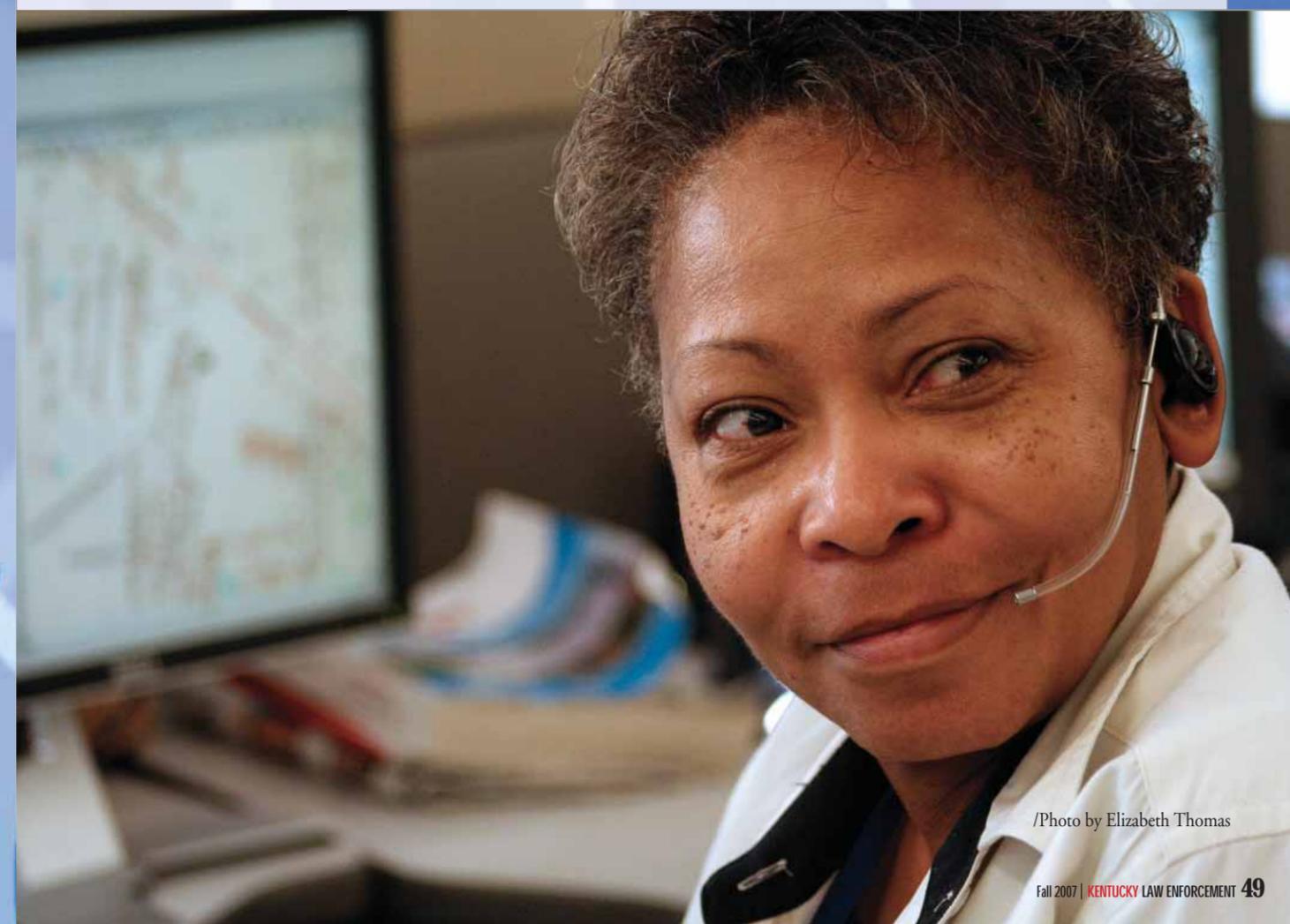
Montgomery County's Johnson makes it a point to tell new hires about the dichotomous nature of the job.

"One of the things we tell people when they first come in is, 'This is going to be the hardest job you're ever going to love to do,'" Montgomery County's Johnson said. "And it's either going to go one of two ways when we hire somebody – you're either cut out to do this craziness or you're not, and if you're not we'll know and you'll know really, really quickly."

### A Shared Perspective

A sense of compassion for their fellow man coupled with long hours spent in often tight >>

▼ Carolyn Linton is in her seventh year as a call taker at Louisville Metro's MetroSafe Communication Center. Linton was the recipient of the Call Taker of the Year award as part of the department's recognition of National Telecommunicators Appreciation Week in April.



/Photo by Elizabeth Thomas



/Photo by Elizabeth Thomas

>> quarters and shared on-the-job experiences is what also binds telecommunicators together.

“A lot of folks are in the job for a job, a paycheck, unfortunately,” recently retired Hopkinsville Communication Center supervisor, Dee Hopper, said. “But this is a career. It’s a life, actually, because you spend eight hours in a room with people, 40 hours a week, sometimes more than that, and talk about anything and everything under the sun, and you become friends, almost family.”

Matter of fact, in Bowling Green, the whole police department has attempted to adopt this family mentality in the way in which their telecommunicators and officers interact.

“We have a real teamwork environment,” Bowling Green Communication Center Director Malissa Carter said. “In a lot of places there is a divide, a kind of us-against-them feeling between sworn and civilian. We have a history of having police chiefs here that believe that everyone is a police department employee. Our former chief, Bill Waltrip, and then our current chief, Doug Hawkins – they’ve both done tremendous things to break that divide down.”

Bowling Green telecommunicators at-

here is that teamwork between dispatchers and the officers and the dispatchers and firefighters.”

A trend that may help foster teamwork in an agency between telecommunicators and the officers is that many individuals interested in eventually becoming police officers choose to get their start in the communication center. In her 18 years of experience, Montgomery County’s Johnson has seen the benefits of this trend.

“For years this has been the breeding ground for policemen and firemen,” she said. “When you get a policeman or fireman or paramedic who has been on this side of the radio, it gives them a whole separate understanding of what’s going on when you key up the radio and there’s 16 phone lines ringing and printers are going off. For someone’s who’s sat back here and lived through that, they know. They know, OK, they’re a little covered up right now. It gives it a different perspective.”

It’s a perspective many communication center supervisors and directors would like for the public to see as well. Unfortunately, numerous people will get into the telecommunications field without fully understanding what all it entails. It is a career choice, not just a job, many communication direc-

◀ Kentucky State Police Pikeville Post telecommunicator, Christy Runyon, keeps her Dispatcher’s Medical Desk Reference book close by. In December 2006, Runyon, along with two other Post 9 telecommunicators, had to answer three difficult calls involving Post 9 troopers in one week.

tend shift briefings with the officers to hear what’s going on and are able to contribute a perspective from the other side of the radio that might be helpful to the officers going out on the street.

“I think the dispatchers realize they really wouldn’t have a job without all the officers out there, and the firefighters and the officers know that they really depend on these people in here to give the information to them and keep them safe,” Carter said. “So that’s something that we’re really proud of

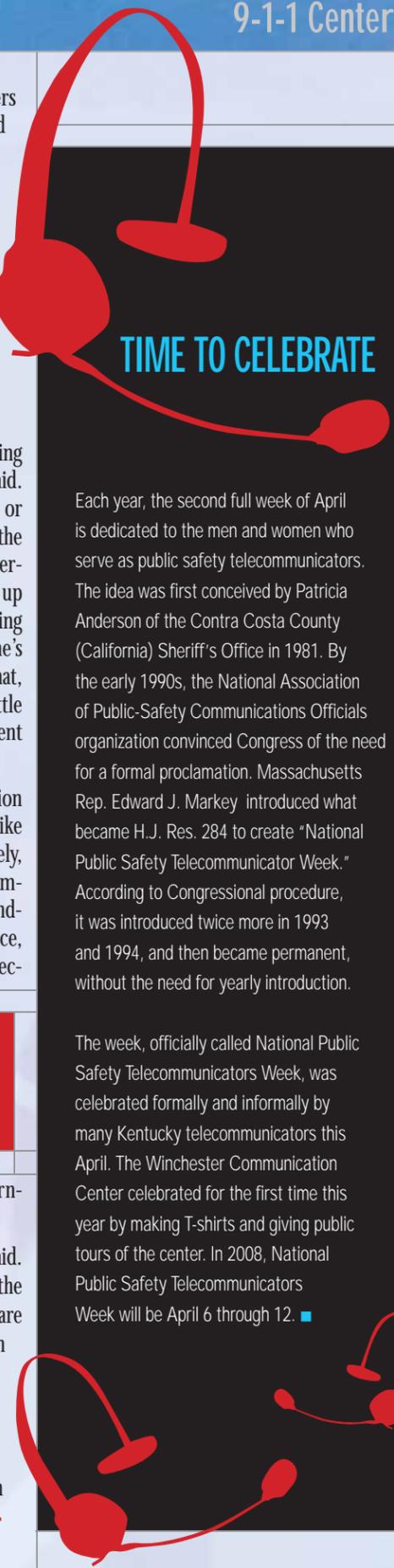
tors agreed. This often leads to high turnover rates among new hires.

“We do have high turnover,” Carter said. “A lot of people don’t understand what the job is; it’s very stressful and the hours are bad. Though people say, ‘Oh yes, I can work evenings and I can work weekends and I can work holidays,’ once they actually have to do it, if they’ve never done that before, the hours are hard on people, especially if you have a family and children or commitments outside of here.” >>

## TIME TO CELEBRATE

Each year, the second full week of April is dedicated to the men and women who serve as public safety telecommunicators. The idea was first conceived by Patricia Anderson of the Contra Costa County (California) Sheriff’s Office in 1981. By the early 1990s, the National Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials organization convinced Congress of the need for a formal proclamation. Massachusetts Rep. Edward J. Markey introduced what became H.J. Res. 284 to create “National Public Safety Telecommunicator Week.” According to Congressional procedure, it was introduced twice more in 1993 and 1994, and then became permanent, without the need for yearly introduction.

The week, officially called National Public Safety Telecommunicators Week, was celebrated formally and informally by many Kentucky telecommunicators this April. The Winchester Communication Center celebrated for the first time this year by making T-shirts and giving public tours of the center. In 2008, National Public Safety Telecommunicators Week will be April 6 through 12. ■





/Photo by Elizabeth Thomas

▲ Donna Pharris, supervisor at the Montgomery County 911 Center, stands in front of one of the department's newly purchased CAD systems. Montgomery County used grant money to purchase CADs and went live with them June 22, 2006. Pharris is also a recent graduate of the first Telecommunications Executive Development course.

>> To combat some of those issues, some agencies, like the Bowling Green Communication Center participate in community awareness activities like citizen police academies and job fairs. They also give tours to the public and school groups and participate in the 911 for Kids program in schools.

But it all comes down to a certain mindset and personality that is required for a successful telecommunicator. Those individuals who stay in telecommunications for 15, 20 or 25 years possess a certain enthusiasm for the fast-paced, high-speed atmosphere.

"I like it busy, the busier the better," Winchester's Rogers said. "I like it when it's so busy that you don't have time to think about it, you just do it. I don't know if it's the

adrenaline, or that every time I answer the phone I may be saving someone's life. God put me on this Earth for a reason, and I think this is mine."

But success in a communication center hinges on more than just enthusiasm and fast pace. There has to be a conscious determination to handle situations flawlessly.

"The old phrase, 'If you're human you're going to make a mistake,' that's OK because people have accepted that as a standard. That's not a standard here," Montgomery County's Johnson said. "We cannot tolerate those kinds of mistakes – we can't tolerate any because when we do make them, people don't go home, people don't wake up – it's bad."

### Out with the old, in with the new

Johnson cited a societal shift that has lowered expectations for employees and customer service in our country today and that lower standard is one she is unwilling to accept in her communication center from her staff.

Changes in cultural expectations have also changed the type of calls that come into today's communication centers, said Hopper, who retired July 31 from the Hopkinsville Communication Center after 28 years.

"People are calling more readily now than they used to – things that you would normally handle neighbor to neighbor," Hopper said. "We're getting more calls on those things that

years ago could have been handled over a cup of coffee."

In 1979, when Hopper began dispatching for the Hopkinsville Police Department, more than just the people and the calls were different. She recalls using patch cables at a telephone switchboard, reminiscent of the show *Mayberry R.F.D.* or Lily Tomlin's comedic skits, in which she played a telephone operator. Though this kind of antiquated system was not the norm in the late 1970s, telecommunications technology has certainly come a long way in the past three decades.

Today most agencies throughout the commonwealth use computer-aided dispatch systems with enhanced 911 lines. These two components provide and keep track of information electronically, as opposed to manually collecting information for each call that comes into the center, typing radio logs with each call and dispatch time and keeping track of all officer locations via punch cards. Though CADs have not made telecommunicators' duties less demanding, they have made transactions in today's communication centers easier, more efficient and more accountable for every piece of information that filters in and out of each terminal.

And with the millions of calls that Kentucky's telecommunicators take each year – 1.3 million in 2006 for Louisville Metro-Safe alone – anything that makes the rollercoaster of this career easier and faster, in turn, makes the communities and officers they help safer.

"I could tell you a story about everybody in there, something they've done because eventually you're going to save somebody's life," Montgomery County's Johnson said.

At the end of the day, that's the overall goal of each and every telecommunicator – that something they did that day played an important role in protecting someone else in their agency or community.

"Bottom line," Bowling Green's Carter said, "we're here to keep the officers safe and keep the citizens safe." 🚒

## DOCJT OFFERS PROGRAM FOCUSED ON TELECOMMUNICATOR HEALTH

For many telecommunicators across the state, inactivity is a huge issue because they spend long periods of time seated at their terminals with little opportunity to get away or move around.

Physical inactivity and unhealthy eating contribute to obesity and a number of chronic diseases, including some cancers, diabetes and cardiovascular disease, which kills nearly 700,000 people in the U.S. each year, according to the Center for Disease Control.

For this reason, The Department of Criminal Justice Training's Physical Training and Defensive Tactics Section has developed a Limited Space and Equipment lesson plan for Kentucky's telecommunicators and office personnel. The plan targets small changes in routine that can have a significant impact on the overall health of an individual who may not have the opportunity to be as active as he or she may like.

"Dispatchers don't have anything like this," said Jeff Knox, DOCJT Physical Training and Defensive Tactics instructor. "Especially sitting behind a desk all day, it is important for us to get them and other office personnel active and doing something."

The lesson plan will educate students on the health benefits associated with physical



training such as less stress, more energy and stamina, better sleeping patterns and improved overall appearance. It will also provide simple strategies for improving overall fitness level, including parking at the end of the parking lot and taking the long way into the building, using stairs instead of elevators and drinking more water. The lesson also includes a video that demonstrates exercises that can be performed at work stations using elastic bands or a tennis ball.

The Limited Space and Equipment lesson plan and video will be incorporated into basic and advanced telecommunications classes in 2008. ■

## DOCJT 2008 TRAINING CLASSES

The Department of Criminal Justice Training's Telecommunications Section will offer a wide variety of classes in 2008 to further develop the skills and abilities of Kentucky's telecommunications community.

### Advanced Telecommunications

- CJIS Full Access Inquiry Only In-service (offered for classroom and online)
- Advanced CJIS/TAC
- Cultural Awareness
- Law Enforcement Mobile Data Terminal Recertification (offered for classroom and online)
- Effective Telecommunications Supervisor
- Telecommunications Supervision Basic
- Managing a Communications Center
- Leaders Role in Developing Their Followers
- Telecommunications Executive Development
- Tactical Dispatch
- Enhanced Telecommunications Skills
- Fire/Hazmat Incident
- Law Enforcement Support Team
- Law Enforcement Support Team In-Service

- Leader's Role in Solving Problems
- Team Building
- Ethics
- Customer Service
- Communications Training Officer
- Communications Training Officer In-Service
- Advanced Emergency Medical Dispatch

### Basic Telecommunications

- Telecommunications Academy
- Telecommunications Academy for the Non-Terminal Agency
- Emergency Medical Dispatch/CPR
- Crisis Negotiations
- Family Violence Across the Lifespan
- Spanish for the Telecommunicator
- Criminal Justice Information Systems Full Access
- Criminal Justice Information Systems Inquiry Only
- Administrative Office of the Courts Criminal Justice Information Systems Inquiry Only
- Law Enforcement Mobile Data Terminal ■

# Path to Professionalism

The past, present and future of Kentucky telecommunications training / Abbie Darst, Public Information Officer

The path to professionalism is marked by dedication, training, education and an unwillingness to settle for second best. The professionalization of telecommunications in the commonwealth has journeyed down that path, and today Kentucky's telecommunicators are meeting or exceeding standards aimed at helping them take the next step on that path.

Communication centers are critical information hubs that provide federal, state and local law enforcement and other emergency responders with valuable information on a continual basis. But until the late 1990s, Kentucky's telecommunicators were not held to as high of a training standard as their law enforcement counterparts.

"At any given time a police officer can pick up that phone and find out anything he or she wants to know about you, from your credit to your criminal [history] to your family, the people you hang around with," Montgomery County 911 Director Ann Johnson said. "Well, the big question here – where do you think they get that information? Who do you think supplies those officers with that information? It's [telecommunicators.] So if they're not held to the same standards, there could be some serious problems."

Prior to 1999, telecommunications training in the commonwealth consisted of a voluntary two-week training course and yearly in-service classes. Though this training proved informative and valuable, the Department of Criminal Justice Training Telecommunications Section staff realized that the training did not cover some critical areas due to time

constraints. They began to analyze training needs in Kentucky and eventually developed and implemented a four-week, academy-style training program.

The first telecommunications academy began in January 1999 and on August 10, 2007, the 52nd class graduated from DOCJT's telecommunication basic training academy.

"It is very heartwarming to see how far that telecommunications in Kentucky has come," said Pat Carter, branch manager for the DOCJT Telecommunications Branch. "We have not generally been known as one of the most forward states in some areas ... but in law enforcement, which includes telecommunications, I don't know of any state that can compare to us. This has been due to the diligence and caring of the agencies we serve and this agency's vision. When there is a milestone graduation, it is a visual reminder of just that. It is a celebration of the hard work on everyone's part."

In the eight years since its inception, the basic academy has undergone some changes, including legislative mandates, which have revolutionized telecommunications training in the commonwealth.

In March 2003, then-Gov. Paul Patton signed House Bill 406, which mandated the four-week academy. According to Carter, the passage of this legislation meant that Kentucky's telecommunicators would be choosing a professional career, not just taking a job. Communications personnel across the state today agree.

"The academy going to four weeks is a good thing. It probably needs to be expanded and

include more hands-on, more intensive training on some things, because of the nature of what we do," said former Hopkinsville Communication Center Supervisor Dee Hopper, who retired July 31. "It's no longer the case of being offered the position, you show up the next day and they say, 'Here's the radio, here's the microphone, here's the unit numbers that you talk to and you're on your own.' Back in the day that's pretty much the way it was. And now, you can't do that. There's too many things that you need to know."

It's that vast need for knowledgeable, confident individuals in communication centers that drives DOCJT's training.

"There is a direct link between how the call is initially handled and how effectively the responders will be able to provide service," DOCJT Telecommunications Section Supervisor Margaret Johnson said. "If a telecommunicator does not obtain and relay the proper information to responders, the results can be devastating."

The main goal of DOCJT's academy is to provide that centralized hub where telecommunicators across the state can learn and be on the same page in training.

During the first week of the academy, trainees learn the role of a telecommunicator, problem solving, proper telephone and radio techniques, and handling fire, Hazmat and critical incidents. Each trainee is taught the importance of obtaining information on location, nature of the incident, injuries, weapons, chemicals and other information that responders may need to adequately respond to requests for service. There are 25 hours of classroom training and

15 hours of practical exercises and tests during the first week. Each trainee works through two rounds of practice scenarios. During the practice as well as the test, trainees receive and dispatch units to non-emergency and emergency police and fire incidents. Each trainee receives a TDD, or Telecommunication Device for the Deaf, call and responds to a traffic stop. Instructors monitor and provide feedback to the trainee after each practice scenario.

"Almost anyone can memorize classroom materials and pass a written test," Carter said. "However, requiring each trainee to pass a practical exam gives better insight into their ability to actually perform the job in real-life situations at their agency."

In the second week, trainees learn the basics of Criminal Justice Information Systems. CJIS provides timely and relevant criminal justice information to the FBI and other qualified law enforcement, criminal justice, civilian, academic, employment and licensing agencies concerning individuals, stolen property, criminal organizations and activities, and other law enforcement related data. Each trainee performs inquiry, entry, modification and cancellation transactions into the CJIS files. In week three, trainees receive training in CPR, emergency medical dispatch and family violence.

During the final week of the academy, trainees are trained in Spanish for the telecommunicator, family violence, and crisis incidents, and they participate in practical exercises. It is during this last 20 hours that trainees demonstrate that the classroom training, studying, teamwork and practice has provided them with the necessary skills to perform their duties in the communication center at their agencies. These exercises are specifically designed to depict what a shift might be like in their communication center. Trainees will respond to numerous police emergency and non-emergency incidents, hostage and critical incidents, fire and/or Hazmat incidents and give pre-arrival instructions for a medical emergency. Trainees will perform CJIS transactions and will answer numerous calls for information. In this final week, trainees are able to put into practical application everything that they have learned over the past four weeks.

DOCJT also offers a three-week telecommunications basic academy for agencies that do not have access to CJIS. This academy is identical to the four-week academy, except week

two of CJIS training is omitted. However, trainees are given a basic overview of the CJIS system and the information they can provide for their law enforcement officers.

Due to the importance of well-trained telecommunicators, some agencies offer extensive on-the-job training to supplement the basic academy training.

"It's pretty standard in Kentucky because everybody, just about every department, goes to the Department of Criminal Justice Training for training, so everybody gets the same base-line training, and then they come back to their own [agency] for different 'how-they-do-it training'," said telecommunicator John Hunt of the KSP Pikeville Post.

To further emphasize the importance of adopting more professional standards for telecommunicators, KRS 15.530-15.590 was passed in 2006, creating the Telecommunicator Professional Standards. The state legislation established pre-employment standards and a certification process for all full-time law enforcement telecommunicators. Similar to the Peace Officers Professional Standards, TPS requires that, prior to employment, applicants must:

- be a citizen of the United States.
- be at least 18 years of age.
- be a high school graduate or have received a general equivalency diplom.a
- never been convicted of a felony or other crimes involving moral turpitude.
- submit fingerprints to KSP and the FBI for a criminal history check.
- take a psychological suitability screener.
- take a polygraph examination.
- pass a drug screen.

"I believe that TPS is one of the best initiatives for the telecommunications profession since mandatory training," DOCJT's Johnson said. "TPS will ultimately enable agencies to hire better qualified, more suitable and desirable people for the job. This should cut down on the turnover rate in our communications centers, which will enable communications supervisors to keep professional, efficient telecommunicators in their communication centers. This will ultimately assist the physical responders in providing better service to the citizens."

Carter agrees that TPS is already changing the face of Kentucky's telecommunications community.

"TPS has already changed telecommunications in Kentucky," she said. "To have some pretty strenuous standards met prior to hiring and training will only bring the best people forward to fill the positions of this important job .... I cannot imagine any agency wanting to know less about an employee who will have privy to sensitive and confidential information, handle each call that comes in and have such impact on the outcome."

Though these standards became effective July 2006, some communication centers across the state have been operating under such standards for several years.

"I was very supportive of those standards when they were proposed by DOCJT because that is something that we always followed here," said Malissa Carter, director of Bowling Green's communication center. "We just always believed that telecommunicators are exposed to so many confidential records and so many important things – the same things that police and fire are exposed to, sometimes more ... so TPS didn't cause us to have to adjust what we did, but I think it is very important, and I am very glad they passed those standards statewide."

The passing of TPS was just one more step on the path to professionalizing telecommunications in the commonwealth.

"Pat Carter at the Department of Criminal Justice Training took this from a job into a career," Montgomery County's Johnson said. "There are levels now, within not just your training, but within a lot of communication centers across the state where you can promote, you can advance, you can get a job where you can eventually get to work Monday through Friday with weekends and holidays off."

The search for the best, most professional training practices for telecommunications continues to be the focus of DOCJT's training staff.

"The group of people in this branch are always enthusiastic about changing things for the betterment of the people we serve," Carter said. "As for what is on the horizon in telecommunications training, only the very best and newest ideas possible." J

# The Technology Horizon

Telecommunications technology is rapidly changing to increase efficiency, effectiveness

Abbie Darst, Public Information Officer

Communication centers have come a long way technologically in the last decade. From punch cards, typed logs and written notes to sophisticated computerized dispatch systems, the fast pace of today's communication centers can barely keep up with the newest horizon of available technology.

Since the creation of the National Crime Information Center in 1967 and the Law Information Network of Kentucky in 1974, the most predominant technological advancement in today's communication centers was the introduction and adoption of computer-aided dispatch systems or CADs. CADs use one or more servers located in a central dispatch office, which communicate with computer terminals in the communication center or with mobile data terminals installed in police vehicles. Though there are various forms of CAD programs that suit department needs, the logistics of each system are the same. CADs allow tele-

agencies to keep track of a plethora of information automatically. CADs

- log on/off times of law enforcement personnel
- generate and archiving incidents that begin with a phone call from a citizen or originate from personnel in the field
- assign field personnel to incidents
- update incidents and logging those updates
- generate case numbers for incidents that require an investigation
- time stamp every action taken by the telecommunicator at the terminal

With the advent of enhanced 911, when a 911 call comes into a communication center, the caller's phone number, name and address are automatically dumped into the CAD system. There is special privacy legislation that permits emergency operators to obtain the caller's information. This information is gathered by mapping the calling phone number to an ad-

dress and emergency service number or ESN in a database. This database function is known as ALL, automatic location identification.

However, as technology as a whole continues to change, communication-center technology has to keep up in order to provide the best service to its citizens.

"Cell phones changed the world of communication," Montgomery County 911 Director Ann Johnson said. "Used to be we'd get a call on an accident 15 to 20 minutes after it happened when somebody got to a pay phone. Now we get 35 calls on the same incident while it's happening."

In an effort to better serve the ever-increasing number of wireless customers in the commonwealth, the state Office of the 911 Coordinator in cooperation with the Commercial Mobile Radio Service Board (an agency of the Kentucky Office of Homeland Security) are working to improve the effectiveness and reliability of Kentucky's wireless 911 service. They are providing 911 telecommunicators with the greatest possible information on wireless 911 calls. The wireless enhanced 911, or E911, project is divided into two phases. Phase I requires wireless carriers, upon request from a

local public safety answering point, or PSAP, to report the telephone number of a wireless 911 caller and the location of the cell tower antenna that received the call. Phase II requires wireless carriers to provide far more precise location information, within 50 to 300 meters in most cases. Most agencies in Kentucky are either already Phase II compliant or working toward it. Unfortunately, a big misconception among the public is that telecommunicators are capable of precisely locating an individual calling from a cell phone. Even those agencies that are Phase II compliant can usually only pinpoint within 200 meters of the caller, Bowling Green advanced dispatcher, Lori Cooper, said.

After wireless Phase II capabilities are achieved, technology referred to as Next Generation 911 is on the horizon, which will allow communication centers to receive streaming video, text messages and photos from cell phones directly into the 911 system.

In addition, some agencies have interactive maps linked to their systems that plot the location of the 911 call on the map. In Bowling Green, aerial photos have been loaded into their CAD systems so they can hone in on a specific place and see the exact locations, houses, fire hydrants and more. Similarly, at the Kentucky State Police Pikeville Post, every residence in Pike County has been photographed and loaded into their system, so they have a picture of the residence to which they are dispatching emergency response. These images allow them to pinpoint certain features of the home or surrounding yard that may be useful to the responders in route, KSP Pikeville Post telecommunicator, John Hunt, explained.

Another advantage interactive maps can offer is the use of emergency notification systems, often referred to as reverse 911. Reverse 911 systems allow an agency to call a predefined subset of subscribers within the population that needs to be notified of a specific event or disaster, according to Mary Pedersen, chief information officer of the Kentucky Office of Homeland Security.

KOHS and the Kentucky Intelligence Fusion Center have generated a reverse 911 program for the four-county area below the Wolf Creek Dam as a proactive step to protect citizens in the event that the area needed to be evacuated at any point during the dam construction and reinforcement project. This reverse 911 system is a Web-based system that can be activated from the fusion center in Frankfort or anywhere there is Web access. With just a few clicks a KSP dispatcher can initiate the notification, which is based on a preset notification from the Army Corps of Engineers, Pedersen said. There are approximately 18,000 phone numbers loaded into the system.

"We did a lot of testing, and it worked," Pedersen said. "Folks were notified. We didn't receive any negative response from that testing."

KOHS is also exploring other possible uses for the reverse 911 system.

"After the Virginia Tech incident - that's very big on the minds of universities .... How effective was their system of student notification, faculty notification?" Pedersen said. "What do we have in place in Kentucky, and what can we do better to ensure we get the word out on any type of emergency event immediately to the student population? That's got us cracking the whip and making us move a little faster."

KOHS is also exploring the possibility of getting a statewide reverse 911 system, but it is a very costly system to make available in such a large capacity, Pedersen said.

"Our goal is to always offer the essential tools and technologies for free when and where we can," she said.

KOHS is not the only agency who has reverse 911 capabilities in the state. Through grant funding, other agencies have been able to get various forms of local reverse 911 systems.

In 2003, the Daviess County Communication Center received a \$1 million federal grant to improve its emergency-responder and 911-operations system. A portion of the money was used to install a reverse 911 system for the county. The system allows telecommunicators to draw a circle on a map, tell the computer to dial every house in the encircled area and put out a particular message notifying the people in the community of a major event within seconds or minutes, said Paul Nave, supervisor of the Daviess County Communication Center. The computer will call 20 people every minute, he said.

In addition to the reverse 911 system, the grant enabled Daviess County to bring numerous technological advancements to the agency, including card access doors and video projection throughout the agency for increased security, mobile data units in patrol cars and an interoperability radio repeater and other radio equipment upgrades that allow county and city law enforcement officers to communicate.

In case of a disaster, such as an earthquake, chances are the phone systems will be down, so this new technology provides Daviess County the capability to talk directly to the Owensboro city dispatch center, Indiana State Police and every county that surrounds Daviess County through the radio system, Nave explained.

"We were pretty much in a world of our own, but now that we've opened up the walls, the walls have come down and we talk to pretty much any agency surrounding us," Nave said. "One of the hardest things for a criminal to do is to beat a radio. We can save someone's life. For example, if they're doing a pursuit in Indiana, if we can put strips across the road and save that pursuit from killing someone, then it's worth every penny that we've done."

As demonstrated in Daviess County, >>

branch manager of the DOCJT Telecommunications Branch.

## FIRST TELECOMMUNICATIONS EXECUTIVE DEVELOPMENT CLASS GRADUATES

The Department of Criminal Justice Training's first Telecommunications Executive Development class graduated August 17. The class, made up of communication center directors and supervisors from across the commonwealth has spent nearly two years refining their leadership and management skills.

"Instructors, students and courses such as these help develop the skills needed to maintain the highest standards of professional excellence in Kentucky's telecommunicators," said Pat Carter,

Designed to develop the leadership abilities of telecommunications supervisors, managers and directors, the course enhances each student's ability to perform at an executive level and provides insight and analysis to help students develop their leadership potential. The course focuses on contemporary theories relating to leadership, emotional intelligence and personnel development.

"We're undervalued in our field, but when people are properly trained, we can let people know that we're a profession that's here to help you," said graduate Andrea Jones, telecommunicator at the Northern Kentucky University Police Department. "They think we're just there answering phones, and they don't realize the underlying responsibilities. But there's so much more. Classes like this will bring respect to our profession." ■



Photo by Elizabeth Thomas

>> grants can have a significant impact on the technology and services that a communication center can supply to its agency and citizens.

Montgomery County received a \$500,000 grant in 2005 that allowed it to install CAD systems in the communication center. In January, 2007, Gov. Ernie Fletcher announced 911-improvement grants that provided eight local communities funds to upgrade 911 services from basic 911 to enhanced 911, which totaled nearly \$950,000.

"As soon as we catch up to technology we turn around and man, where'd it go, it's gone again," Montgomery County's Johnson said. "A lot of your big bells and whistles are in your communication centers, they're kind of the hub for that; I don't think it'll ever stop. ... As needs change the services change. And as the services change our role in that is always going to change."

One of the latest technologies acquired by MetroSafe, the Louisville Metro communication center, is software that assists dispatchers in monitoring the locations of ambulances and paramedic units. The software will automatically flag situations where an ambulance may be needed and the dispatcher can set that in motion with a couple of keystrokes and a call to the ambulance service. This capability allows Louisville EMS to always stay a few steps ahead of what's about to happen, Louisville EMS Director Neal Richmond said.

Another form of technology that was made more widely known by the popular TV show

Extreme Makeover – Home Edition is being used in several Kentucky communities and communication centers, including Winchester and Lexington. Project Lifesaver established as an initiative of the 43rd Search and Rescue Company of the Chesapeake, Virginia, Sheriff's Office, is a national program now operating in more than 30 states. In Kentucky, the state coordinator is the Franklin County Sheriff's Office.

Project Lifesaver's mission is to use state-of-the-art technology to search for and rescue people with Alzheimer's disease, autism and related disorders who become lost. According to public safety experts, a lost person with Alzheimer's or other dementia represents a critical emergency, since more than half of them will become injured, fall victim to predators or die if not found within 24 hours.

Project Lifesaver is an active system that relies on state-of-the-art technology and specially trained search-and-rescue teams. People in the program wear a personalized bracelet that emits a tracking signal. When care givers notify agencies that the person is missing, a search-and-rescue team responds to the wanderer's area and starts searching with the mobile locator tracking system. The Lifesaver bracelet is a radio wrist transmitter that emits an automatic tracking signal every second, 24 hours a day. The signal is tracked on the ground or in the air over several miles. Each bracelet has a unique radio frequency.

In Clark County there are approximately five individuals using the wristbands and files containing personal information that may assist in narrowing down the search area for these individuals are located in the communication

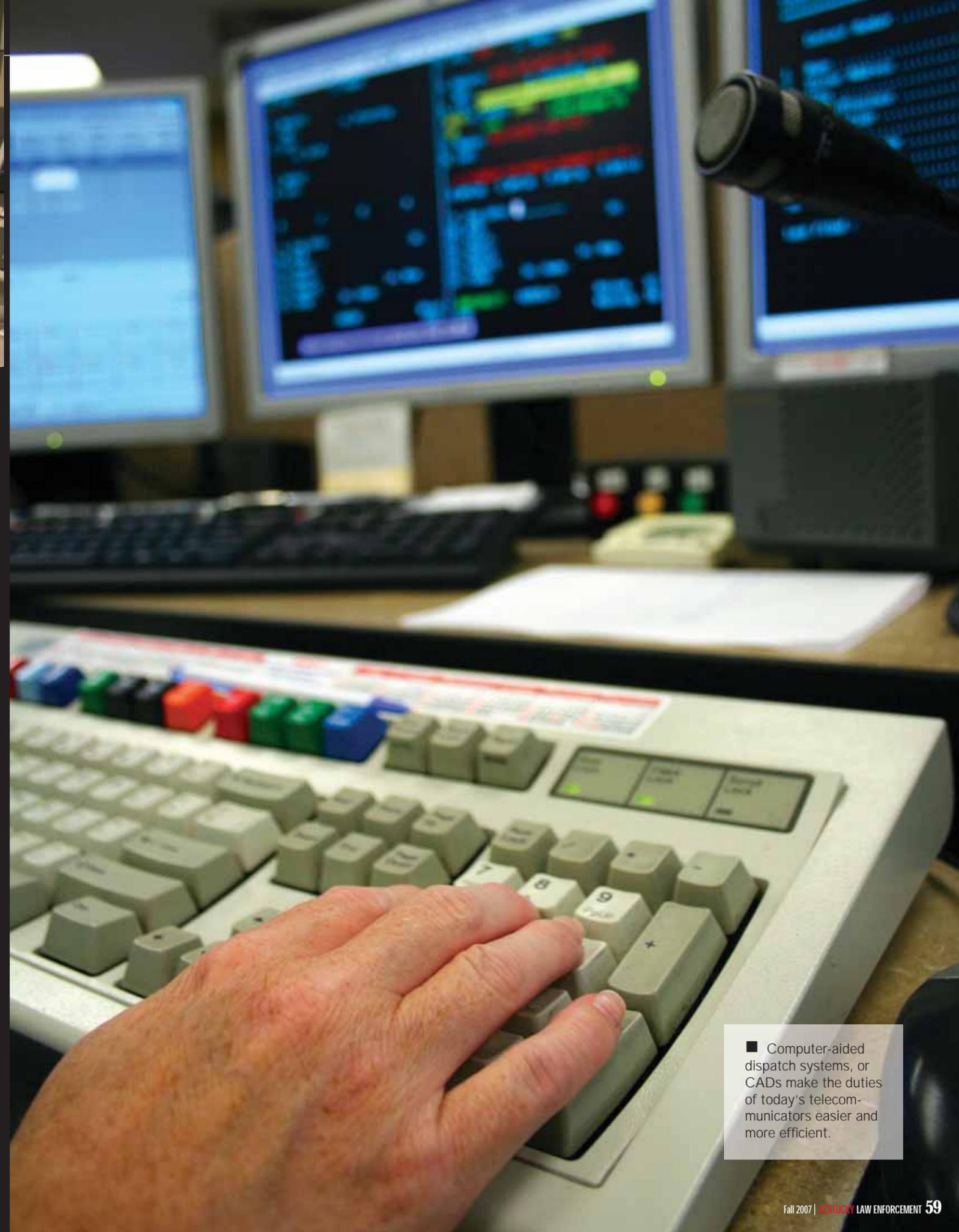
▲ Ronnie Blakemore has served as a telecommunicator with the Winchester Communication Center since 1995. Winchester is one of few departments in Kentucky involved in both 911 for Kids and Project Lifesaver.

center at the Winchester Police Department.

"I think it's an awesome program," said Rhonda Rogers, supervisor of the Winchester Communication Center. "How many times do you hear about somebody wandering off ... and that they've frozen to death or end up dead?" Winchester communication supervisor Rhonda Rogers said. "Our county is working on a scholarship program to make these bracelets available to those individuals who could greatly benefit from the program, but can't afford it."

These are just some examples of the new technology that is becoming available to law enforcement and telecommunicators all of the time. As the communities they serve continue to change, agencies must keep up with technology that will increase the efficiency and effectiveness of today's first responders.

"After enhanced 911 took over, yearly it's changing. You've got cell phones coming in with wireless Phase II to track cell phones and the next generation [911] coming on, it's just exploding," said recently retired Hopkinsville Communication Center Supervisor Dee Hopper. "Like your personal cell phone, you don't keep it for very long, you change them out often – technology is changing rapidly in our business." J



■ Computer-aided dispatch systems, or CADs make the duties of today's telecommunicators easier and more efficient.