

The Heroes We Never See

Novi dispatchers keep calm when emergencies come calling

The phone calls start coming in rapid succession to the Novi Regional 9-1-1 Center.

A female driver, possibly with a medical condition, is stalled in the middle of Novi Road. The next call concerns a person in an office complex who refuses to leave the building. Moments later, a third caller states a live animal trap is discovered on the playground at a local middle school.

The two dispatchers on duty quickly respond to each of the calls, gathering the necessary information and then relaying it to police and fire personnel. Their goal is to have an emergency vehicle on the road in 30 seconds or less.

"They're a very talented group," Novi Communications Manager Alan Patterson said of the 12 full-time dispatchers who work at the 9-1-1 center. "There's a lot to know in every position, and you have to know it now because it's usually an emergency."

The dispatch center answers emergency and non-emergency calls for the cities of Novi and South Lyon. It covers a residential population of slightly

over 70,000 and a service area of about 36 square miles.

Dispatchers work 12-hour shifts, responding to dozens of critical calls when time is of the essence. Last year, 90,754 incidents were dispatched and the center received 23,548 9-1-1 calls. The average time between when the call was received and dispatched for a fire or medical run

the home to check on his welfare.

Patterson said her favorite call that day was reaching out to the man's daughter, to let her know that her dad was okay.

NEXTGEN 9-1-1

There are 20 PSAP (Public Safety Answering Point) stations, including the sheriff's office, throughout Oakland

"No matter what's going on, you always have to be prepared for that next call."

Kellie Marzolf, Novi Dispatcher

was 38 seconds, and for an emergency police run it was 89 seconds.

"You're helping someone," said Kellie Marzolf, a dispatcher with Novi since 2001. "People call us sometimes in the worst moment of their lives, and it's a great feeling when you can help them out."

'A GOOD OUTCOME'

Karen Patterson started dispatching for the city in 2000.

"I like helping people," said Patterson. "I like the feeling that I'm making a positive difference."

A few years back, she took a 9-1-1 call from a suicidal man with a gun. She spent 90 minutes on the phone trying to talk him down.

"At that point, you're the only person who can help," she said. "You have to establish rapport with the person before you can get them to do anything. It was a challenge to keep the conversation going while reaching for a good outcome."

She convinced the man to put down the weapon and allow police officers to enter

County. Nearly all of them dispatch for multiple jurisdictions. Each PSAP is in the process of getting updated with a new system called Next Generation 9-1-1 that's being installed through Emergency CallWorks, a private company with Motorola Solutions.

The City of Southfield is the first PSAP that's up and running with the NextGen 9-1-1 system. Alan Patterson said the City of Novi should be online by June or July.

Under NextGen 9-1-1, all the old copper communication lines running underground are being abandoned and replaced with fiber optic.

"With fiber optic, the public has the ability to text to 9-1-1," Patterson said. "The public will be able to send photos and even short video clips to the 9-1-1 operator so they can perhaps see crimes occurring in real time, as opposed to the officers arriving at the scene."

New mapping capabilities with NextGen 9-1-1 will allow dispatchers to accurately pinpoint the location of an emergency call, a critical function considering an estimated



Briann Salyers is one of 12 full-time dispatchers at the Novi Regional 9-1-1 Center.

70 percent of 9-1-1 calls are now made from mobile phones, according to the Federal Communication Commission.

TRUE PROFESSIONALS

At the end of the day, it's the dispatchers who make the difference.

"We always remind our dispatchers that it might be the first time a person is calling 9-1-1," Patterson said. "The interaction they have with dispatch is really going to shape how they view the Novi Police Department. Our job is to treat everyone well, and make sure they understand we care."

To that end, dispatchers are required to attend 24 hours of continuing education over a two-year cycle. In addition, the City also provides training opportunities.

"A lot of the training is focused on

On the Call

The Novi Regional 9-1-1 Center received a lot of calls last year.

- **9-1-1 calls received:** 23,548
- **Calls that required dispatch:** 90,754
- **Average time from call to dispatch:** 38 seconds (fire, medical); 89 seconds (emergency police)
- **Number of Novi dispatchers:** 12

teaching our team how to be true professionals and leaders," Patterson said. "You're taking a lot of similar calls over and over, so it's important to stay sharp."

The same dispatcher has to know the number of vehicles to send in an emergency situation in Novi, and how many vehicles to send out in a similar situation that occurs in South Lyon. The dispatcher has to know how many stations they're going to tone out for a fire or medical emergency, and who should

respond if there's a mutual aid request from the City of Northville.

Marzolf said it's those very challenges that make the job so rewarding.

"You can go from total silence to all the lines lighting up within a matter of minutes," she said. "There's a lot of variety in this job, and things can get pretty stressful. But no matter what's going on, you always have to be prepared for that next call."



Officer Jason Meier looks on as dispatcher Briann Salyers takes an emergency call.



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