

it's never dull at 911

Calls from routine to high-energy handled

By BYRON ROHRIG

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"Two-Edward, two-four"
"Edward, two-four"
"...A 9-1-1 hang-up. We got an answering machine on call-back. Now there's no answer."
"Clear"
"Please disregard. They called back and there is no problem."

Many of the transmissions are routine, like this one, alerting a police officer patrol on Evansville's East Side that the universal emergency number has been dialed, but that nobody was on the line. Officers are dispatched on all such calls unless determined the call was dialed by mistake.

But a lot of the calls handled 24/7 by the crew at Central Dispatch take a lot more than talking.

Lori Leslie recalled working Feb. 26, 2001, the night Paul McManus shot to death his wife and two daughters, then drove to the twin bridges and survived a plunge into the frigid Ohio River.

"I had (a member of the victims' family) on the phone, and I was dispatching fire units to the scene at the time. ... I knew (the victims) were dead, but I can't tell it."

On New Year's Eve 2002, Linda Brooks spent 40 minutes on the phone with Scott Cates, a fugitive who had escaped the previous day from a Gibson County sheriff's office. Cates was in a mobile home off Bergdolt Road. Police and sheriff's deputies had surrounded the scene. "He had been high on methamphetamine for three days and was very volatile he wouldn't talk to me - else once he started talking to

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"I think she saved his life," Leslie said. Cates, who had been armed with a .40-caliber handgun, was apprehended after bolting from the trailer, ending a standoff that lasted nearly five hours.

Brooks, 34, a Ferdinand, Ind., native and wife of Indiana State Trooper Loren Brooks, says the job is "emotionally draining."

Leslie, 31, a Castle High grad, earned a degree in criminal justice, but became a dispatcher because she didn't want to be a police officer. She said fielding calls from agitated people and dealing with sometimes desperate situations have rendered her unable to tolerate Judge Judy and other "in your face" television shows.

Supervisor Kevin Bayer, a 30-year-old Evansville native, recalls taking a call from a suicidal businessman who was in his office with a pistol and wanted to end it all. He dispatched police to the scene and kept the man on the line. As units arrived, a shot rang out on the other end of the line. But the man was not injured, though a metallic object in the office, possibly a filing cabinet, was a little worse for the experience.

Six dispatchers and a supervisor work around the clock except the all-night shift, when there are five dispatchers - at the Evansville-Vanderburgh County Central Dispatch Center on Harmony Way, Bayer said. Central Dispatch takes all emergency calls, transferring ambulance calls but dispatching everything from police, sheriff's and fire runs to animal control officers and traffic engineers.

City Police Capt. Clayton Grace is commander of the center, which is governed by a board of directors which includes the sheriff, city police and fire chiefs and mayoral, City Council and County Commissioners representatives. The 2004 budget for Central Dispatch is \$2,630,791. The county is

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-Dispatcher Lori Leslie

responsible for a third of that cost; the remainder is paid by the city

Demand on Central Dispatch has increased markedly in recent years. From 252,522 phone calls to dispatchers in 1997, the number increased to 409,183 last year that's up by 156,661 calls, or a change in daily average from 691 in 1997 to 1,121 last year.

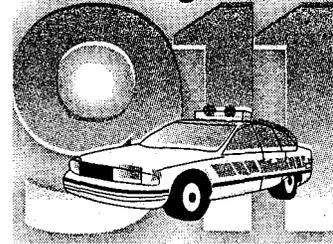
Over the same seven years, total dispatched runs increased by 44,881, from 156,164 to 201,045, according to Central Dispatch statistics.

Last year, Evansville police got the overwhelming number of runs 143,311. The Sheriff's Department was dispatched 27,946 times for the year. The third largest number of dispatches were to the Evansville Fire Department 16,147.

From the highs experienced in helping catch "the bad guys" to the frustrations of getting so many repeat domestic violence runs that they can instantly recognize voices and addresses, both Leslie and Brooks say they love the pace, the fact that a shift is never boring and the truths about people and life that are borne out daily.

"Everybody has the same problems," Leslie said. "You can find yourself talking one minute to someone with five kids who works at McDonald's, the next minute to someone who lives in a \$2 million home in Darmstadt."

Some things worth knowing about



ULLMI-

- When a crime is being committed
- When someone is in danger
- When you need an ambulance
- When you need a fire truck

DON'T CALL 911 -

- When electrical power fails
- When you want to know if someone is in jail
- When you want to know the time
- When you want general information or a phone number
- When you're curious about a police car or ambulance in your neighborhood

CELL PHONE USAGE has resulted in a dramatic jump in false 911 calls. Learning from your cell phone manual how to lock your keypad can guard against accidental 911 calls (some phones will dial 911 when any key is depressed and held).

IF YOU DIAL 911 ACCIDENTALLY, stay on the line and inform the operator of that. Until Dispatch verifies there is no emergency, a unit will continue to your location.

WHEN TRAINING CHILDREN to dial 911 in an emergency, teach them to dial NINE-ONE-ONE, not nine-eleven. There is no 11 key on the phone and this could confuse a child.

MARK COOMER / Courier & Press