

Dan Lee presided.



Bill McGown, Operations Manager of the 911 Call Center (Photo by Edgington)

This was our first field trip. We visited the Prince George's County Public Safety Communications 9-1-1 Center located near the end of Melford Blvd in Melford, formerly known as the University of Maryland Science and Technology Center. It is part of Homeland Security, not part of the Prince George's Police, Fire, or EMS services. Each county can have only one county-administered 911 Center, so it is remarkable that this new location is at the far northeastern corner of the county. Apparently the new antenna on the northwestern corner of the interchange of US Route 50/301 and MD Route 3 is high enough and powerful enough to reach the whole county.

If you wish to have police, fire, or EMS services dispatched on a non-emergency basis, call (301) 352-1200. You'll probably still be dealing with a dispatcher at the 911 Center but you will not tie up emergency services. If you need to contact the County regarding other non-emergency services, call 311.

Submitted by Barry Hammond

If you call 911 on a modern cell phone, manufactured in the last few years, it will provide the Call Center with a fairly accurate location of where you are calling from. If you are called from a hardwired phone, you may be asked where you are calling from. Older hardwired phones should show up accurately in their database but phones using Voice Over the Internet Protocol (VOIP) may not be appropriately registered. You remember that Irv Salzberg gave a talk and demonstration last fall on his conversion from Verizon FiOS to VOIP. Part of the process, if done correctly, is to pay a small fee to have the phone registered to the location where it is most commonly used. Irv takes his phone with him when he goes on vacations. If he should call 911 from one of those locations, he must either be careful to tell the operator where he is calling from or have temporarily reregistered his phone with the local authorities. If you use a VOIP service, you can email [VOIPTestRequest@CO.PG.MD.US](mailto:VOIPTestRequest@CO.PG.MD.US) to request an appointment to test your phone to see whether the call center can accurately locate you.

Since the Senior Center's phone number is the same as City Hall's, you must be careful to tell the emergency operator exactly where you are calling from. Ironically, an emergency call from a cell phone may pinpoint your location better than a call from a hard-wired phone.

The building is new with excellent accommodations and equipment. Motorola was the general contractor. Subcontractors supplied equipment and services at cut-rate prices because they want to be part of Motorola's plans to build many more of these centers throughout the US.

One of the Call Center's biggest problems is hiring sufficient qualified staff, a majority of which has worked there less than five years. They must have good diction, memory, observational and multitasking skills. They must be able to type accurately at 35 words per minute. The center especially needs Spanish speaking operators. They each undergo 240 hours of classroom training plus an additional 80 hours in a training lab with call center consoles and equipment identical to those on the main floor.



This console is identical to those in the Call Center with full functionality. It is used to train operators. Each screen shows specific information. The one on the top displays the radios available for communication. The one on the right displays the caller's GPS coordinates on a map of the area in which he is located. The screen in the center displays data provided by the caller, responders, and the Call Center operator. (Photo courtesy of Dennis Edgington)

They operate under standardized protocols developed by the county, state, and federal departments of homeland security and emergency services. In an emergency, if you call in, listen to the instructions and requests for information from the operators. They are trained to ask for information in a particular order. Do not hang up until instructed to do so. Be aware that the operator may have already instructed the dispatchers to send help while he or she is still asking you for further information. If you don't know the answer to a question, say so, and the operator will move on to the next question. It will save time. Callers whose native language is not English can be connected with a

translator for their language if it is one of the approximately forty most common foreign languages spoken in Prince George's County.

Each of us was able to sit beside an operator at his console for about 15 minutes and listen to the emergency calls he handled and his description of what he was doing and why. While I was sitting with an operator, she received two or three cell phone calls when the caller immediately hung up. She was required to call that number back to ascertain whether there indeed was an emergency. She said they receive a lot of those when school is letting out. Students are not always careful when operating their cell phones. The operator also received an irate call from an apartment dweller in Greenbelt who had arrived home to find all of her electronics (TV's, X-Box, computer) stolen. She was Hispanic whose command of English was marginal, so the operator obtained the contract services of a translator to get the details before putting the caller in contact with the Greenbelt Police. Time elapsed was only about two minutes with the caller on the phone with the operator the entire time.

<http://www.princegeorgescountymd.gov/Government/AgencyIndex/OHS/pdfs/PSCCallTakingProcess.pdf> is an excellent description of what the call center is and does and the training that the operators get.

<http://www.princegeorgescountymd.gov/Government/AgencyIndex/OHS/pdfs/911+DOS+AND+DONTs.pdf> is useful advice for 911 callers.