

Bureau of Emergency Communications

9-1-1 Press Release

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For Immediate Release

April 9, 2009

National Public-Safety Telecommunications Week BOEC Awards Banquet

The Bureau of Emergency Communications (BOEC) proudly honors the men and women who serve as public safety dispatchers and call-takers (9-1-1) during **National Public-Safety Telecommunications Week, April 12-18, 2009.**

Introduced to Congress in 1991 by the Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials (APCO) International, National Public-Safety Telecommunications Week is held during the second week in April each year. This week is dedicated to public safety Telecommunicators who aid in providing 9- 1-1 emergency assistance to citizens everywhere.

The term "9-1-1" is often associated with rapid emergency response, poise under pressure, aid and compassion in times of distress, and critical decision-making within seconds. Many people do not stop to think about these seemingly nameless, faceless individuals until they experience an actual emergency themselves. These professionals make the difference between life and death in many instances.

This year, BOEC will host its **Sixteenth Annual Employee Awards Banquet** on Monday, April 13, 2009. This banquet will honor the Employee of the Year, Supervisor of the Year, Outstanding Team Member, and many other achievements made by BOEC employees during the past year. The awards banquet will be held at the Gray Gables Estate, 3009 SE Chestnut St, Portland 97267. The awards banquet is open to the media.

BOEC would like to invite members of the local media to come spend some time with our 9-1-1 dispatchers as they answer 9-1-1 & non-emergency calls and dispatch police, fire, and medical units. This will give you an opportunity to see how difficult their job is and just how incredible they truly are.

If you would like more information about the banquet, or would like to schedule a sit-along, please contact the Bureau's Public Information Officer (PIO) listed above.

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A Tribute To Dispatchers

By Chief Thomas Wagoner
Loveland (Colo.) Police Department

Someone once asked me if I thought that answering telephones for a living was a profession. I said, "I thought it was a calling."

And so is dispatching. I have found in my law enforcement career that dispatchers are the unsung heroes of public safety. They miss the excitement of riding in a speeding car with lights flashing and sirens wailing. They can only hear of the bright orange flames leaping from a burning building. They do not get to see the joy on the face of worried parents as they see their child begin breathing on its own, after it has been given CPR.

Dispatchers sit in darkened rooms looking at computer screens and talking to voices from faces they never see. It's like reading a lot of books, but only half of each one.

Dispatchers connect the anxious conversations of terrified victims, angry informants, suicidal citizens and grouchy officers. They are the calming influence of all of them-the quiet, competent voices in the night that provide the pillars for the bridges of sanity and safety. They are expected to gather information from highly agitated people who can't remember where they live, what their name is, or what they just saw. And then, they are to calmly provide all that information to the officers, firefighters, or paramedics without error the first time and every time.

Dispatchers are expected to be able to do five things at once-and do them well. While questioning a frantic caller, they must type the information into a computer, tip off another dispatcher, put another caller on hold, and listen to an officer run a plate for a

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parking problem. To miss the plate numbers is to raise the officer's ire; to miss the caller's information may be to endanger the same officer's life. But, the officer will never understand that.

Dispatchers have two constant companions, other dispatchers and stress. They depend on one, and try to ignore the other. They are chastened by upset callers, taken for granted by the public, and criticized by the officers. The rewards they get are inexpensive and infrequent, except for the satisfaction they feel at the end of a shift, having done what they were expected to do.

Dispatchers come in all shapes and sizes, all races, both sexes, and all ages. They are blondes, and brunettes, and redheads. They are quiet and outgoing, single, or married, plain, beautiful, or handsome. No two are alike, yet they are all the same.

They are people who were selected in a difficult hiring process to do an impossible job. They are as different as snowflakes, but they have one thing in common. They care about people and they enjoy being the lifeline of society-that steady voice in a storm-the one who knows how to handle every emergency and does it with style and grace; and, uncompromised competence.

Dispatchers play many roles: therapist, doctor, lawyer, teacher, weatherman, guidance counselor, psychologist, priest, secretary, supervisor, politician, and reporter. And few people must jump through the emotional hoops on the trip through the joy of one caller's birthday party, to the fear of another caller's burglary in progress, to the anger of a neighbor blocked in their drive, and back to the birthday caller all in a two-minute time frame. The emotional roller coaster rolls to a stop after an 8 or 10 hour shift, and they are expected to walk down to their car with steady feet and no queasiness in their stomach-because they are dispatchers. If they hold it in, they are too closed. If they talk

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about it, they are a whiner. If it bothers them, it adds more stress. If it doesn't, they question themselves, wondering why.

Dispatchers are expected to have:

- the compassion of Mother Theresa
- the wisdom of Solomon
- the interviewing skills of Oprah Winfrey
- the gentleness of Florence Nightingale
- the patience of Job
- the voice of Barbara Streisand
- the knowledge of Einstein
- the answers of Ann Landers
- the humor of David Letterman
- the investigative skills of Sgt. Joe Friday
- the looks of Melanie Griffith or Don Johnson
- the faith of Billy Graham
- the energy of Charo
- and the endurance of the Energizer Bunny

Is it any wonder that many drop out during training? It is a unique and talented person who can do this job and do it well. And, it is fitting and proper that we take a few minutes or hours this week to honor you for the job that each of you do. That recognition is overdue and it is insufficient. But, it is sincere.

I have tried to do your job, and I have failed. It takes a special person with unique skills. I admire you and I thank you for the thankless job you do. You are heroes, and I am proud to work with you.

[Chief Wagoner wrote this piece in 1994 in connection with National Telecommunicator Week. He has graciously allowed us to post it here