

New digs, program upgrade for 911 dispatch

By Steve Tool

Wallowa County Chieftain

Wallowa County's 911 dispatch center is sitting pretty in its new home at the Wallowa County Justice Center in Enterprise.

Director Ava Skillings said the former dispatch space was less than 75 square feet for two dispatchers to share on day-shift and virtually unprotected from the public. The computer program for the dispatch center also received an upgrade.

The dispatch center now occupies a much larger space at 104 W. Greenwood St. that includes the front window at the justice center, which dispatch also mans as part of a concession made to fund another position.



Steve Tool/Chieftain

Dispatch Officer Becky Friend, left, and 911 Director Ava Skillings share a humorous moment in the new dispatch center.

"We asked for another full-time position if we would take

over the window duties. We had one person at 32 hours and he

was allowed to go to 40 hours, and that's when we really start-

ed talking about construction." Skillings said. "We received a Wildhorse Foundation grant for the new front window and part of the ballistic (bullet-proof) wall we put in."

The space upgrade included knocking out a wall to unite the former dispatch center and the front window space. The front window was replaced with a smaller, bullet-proof window. During the construction phase of the upgrades, the dispatch office was moved to a back room for several days.

The 911 computer program update included improvements in administrative capabilities, larger monitors and enhancements to the mapping part of the program.

Training for the new system took two days for the

administrative element and each dispatcher trained for a full day between the 911 and mapping elements of the program upgrade. The mapping upgrade includes a more efficient signal finder for those using cellphones to call in an emergency.

"If you get a call from a cell tower, you can click on it and get within a mile of the signal," Skillings said. "You can keep clicking and trying to get a closer location. Cellphones don't give us the exact location."

The new 911 system went online June 15.

"We haven't had any major bugs in the system so far, and when we call Frontier (phone company) they get right here," Skillings said.

FOR THE RECORD

Dispatch log:

Monday, July 11

8:54 a.m.: Horses loose in rural Enterprise.
9:17 a.m.: Missing dog in Enterprise.
10:09 a.m.: Two white German shorthairs with brown heads reported missing from rural Enterprise.
12:01 p.m.: 911 requesting an ambulance in Imnaha.
3:13 p.m.: 911 reporting a hit and run in Enterprise.
3:57 p.m.: Animal neglect reported in Wallowa.
8:54 p.m.: 911 reporting a possible fire in the Troy area. Information given to La Grande Fire Dispatch.
10:51 p.m.: Domestic incident

reported in Enterprise.

Tuesday, July 12

7:07 a.m.: 911 requesting an ambulance in Wallowa.
9:09 a.m.: Burglary reported in Wallowa.
4:25 p.m.: 911 requesting an ambulance in Enterprise.

Wednesday, July 13

8:45 a.m.: 911 requesting an ambulance in Enterprise.
8:45 a.m.: Found female border collie with a black collar and long tail on the Imnaha Highway. Reunited with owner.
11:36 a.m.: Disturbance in rural Joseph.
12:01 p.m.: Two found dogs in Wallowa reunited with owner.
2:14 p.m.: 911 reporting a speeding motorist in rural Joseph.
5:27 p.m.: Traffic stop in Enterprise.

7:00 p.m.: Horses loose on Hurricane Creek.
7:56 p.m.: Violation of no-contact order in Enterprise.
10:13 p.m.: Traffic stop in Enterprise.

Thursday, July 14

8:27 a.m.: 911 calls reporting a civil dispute in rural Joseph.

Friday, July 15

11:42 a.m.: 911 call requesting an ambulance in Joseph.
12:09 p.m.: Report of dead deer on Highway 3. Referred to ODOT.
8:38 p.m.: Disturbance reported in Wallowa. Christopher David Brandenburg, 35, of Wallowa was taken into custody by WCSO for three warrants out of Benson County, Washington. Original charges are residential burglary, theft, and forgery. Mr. Brandenburg was transported to Umatilla County Jail.

8:06 p.m.: 911 reporting lost hikers in rural Joseph. Located and returned to their vehicle.

Saturday, July 16

9:31 a.m.: 911 request for an ambulance at Wallowa Lake.
11:22 a.m.: Trespassing complaint in Joseph.
12:11 p.m.: 911 call for an ambulance in Enterprise.
1:49 p.m.: Report of loose horses in rural Enterprise.
4:04 p.m.: 911 reporting a burglary in Lostine.
6:45 p.m.: Routine traffic stop in Joseph.
6:52 p.m.: Routine traffic stop in Joseph.
8:24 p.m.: Report of probation violation in Imnaha.

Sunday, July 17

7:00 a.m.: Traffic complaint in Joseph.

7:46 a.m.: 911 requesting an ambulance in rural Enterprise.
10:16 a.m.: 911 call reporting a traffic accident in rural Wallowa.
11:13 a.m.: Dog found in Joseph.
2:26 p.m.: 911 requesting an ambulance in rural Enterprise.
3:59 p.m.: Lost wallet reported at Wallowa Lake Tram. The wallet was brought to the Justice Center and the owner was notified.
5:01 p.m.: 911 reporting hay on Highway 82 in rural Joseph.

5:05 p.m.: 911 with a dog complaint at Wallowa Lake.
5:59 p.m.: 911 reporting a non-injury traffic crash on Hurricane Creek Road.
6:03 p.m.: Black and white female rat terrier reported lost in Enterprise.
6:59 p.m.: Loose cows reported in rural Wallowa.
10:03 p.m.: Noise complaint in Enterprise.
10:41 p.m.: Traffic complaint in rural Wallowa.

Sheriff's office looking for reserves

By Steve Tool

Wallowa County Chieftain

Wallowa County Sheriff Steve Rogers looks relaxed at his desk during one of his few spare moments, but he is concerned about a recent call for reserve deputies and the number of respondents he received — none.

"One kid showed up here for an application and I sent him over to (Administrative Services Director Brenda Mica) to get an application, but I have not heard back from him," Rogers said.

The need for additional reserve deputies started about a year ago when several left the force around the same time for various reasons. Then a full-time deputy suffered a heart attack, requiring several months of recovery time.

An increase in criminal activity hasn't helped the situation.

"We've had a lot of people move into this county over the last five or six years who do not have the community's best interests at heart," Rogers said. "A lot of the calls we go on anymore take two men minimum because of the risk involved."

Rogers said he doesn't

mince words when discussing the inherent dangers of the job when interviewing candidates.

"When I interview people, I tell them the straight-up truth. You want to make sure that anyone in here putting on a badge and strapping on a gun after a certain amount of training is fully cognizant of the potential of things that could happen."

Depending on previous experience, a person coming on the force in a reserve capacity likely will have four to five months of classroom training before going on a modified Field Training and Evaluation Program, which means riding with a full-time officer for a period of time. Training times vary depending on the individual's performance and the deputy's observations.

Candidates are not allowed to strap on a gun for some time. Initial training involves an extended period of learning "use of force" rules.

"You have to have a full grasp of the use of force," Rogers said. "When you take the final use of force test you have to score 100 percent to pass."

A thorough background check also is part of the package.

"You have to be pretty straight-up to get into this business," Rogers said.

Reserve deputies get paid, but not when in training with a full-time deputy.

"A significant portion of the population thinks cops are overpaid security guards, and that couldn't be farther from the truth," Rogers said. "It's a step-by-step process that takes some time, and the education

and training level in this business is pretty high."

Saying common sense is the trait he values most, Rogers encourages both men and women to apply.



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