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## Dispatchers offer first line of defense for public

By DEBORAH HIGHLAND [dhighland@bgdailynews.com](mailto:dhighland@bgdailynews.com) 1 hr ago



Always unseen but vital to any emergency response, dispatchers are the first line of defense for the public.

“Many times they are the first point of contact with the public when it comes to a call for service,” Warren County Sheriff’s Office Capt. Tim Robinson said. “They have to gather accurate information to keep the public and deputies safe.”

This week, agencies across the country are celebrating National Telecommunications Appreciation Week.

“They are the unseen link between the public and the deputy,” Robinson said of the dispatchers at the sheriff’s office. “They have to be prepared to answer any type of call from a tax question to an injury collision.”

Dispatch supervisor Candy Hood has been on the receiving end of calls for help at the sheriff’s office for more than a decade.

“The calls that we get that you know you made a difference for someone, that’s my favorite,” Hood said.

In addition to answering every call that comes in to the sheriff’s office, dispatchers also send deputies to respond to calls, keep up with their locations and dig for information on law enforcement databases to provide as much detail as they can to deputies so that they have some idea when they get to a location what they might encounter.

Last week, the county's 15 dispatchers answered 992 calls. It was a slight drop from the prior week when they answered 1,109 calls.

Dispatcher Heather Gregory likes having a job in which she feels she makes a difference.

From her seat at the Warren County Courthouse, she also keeps a watchful eye over the deputies.

She and the other three dispatchers on duty sit in front of six computer screens with one screen devoted to the location and type of call each deputy is working. From the minute a deputy checks out on a call, a timer starts. Depending on the nature of the call, that's how many minutes will pass before a dispatcher keys up the mic and conducts a status check on that deputy.

"I want to make sure they get home to their wives and kids," Gregory said. "That's the No. 1 reason I'm here."

Hood agreed.

"The worst feeling in the world in this job is to call (deputies) and them not answer. You don't want to hear silence when you do a status check."

Dispatcher Denishia Morris gets job satisfaction out of helping people on what could very well be their worst day, she said.

"What might not be important to someone else might be someone else's worst day," she said.

Western Kentucky University Police Department has eight full-time dispatchers and two part-time dispatchers who answer 10,000 to 14,000 calls annually.

"It's extremely, extremely important the role they do," WKU police Officer and public information officer Tim Gray said. "They can be our eyes and ears. Most of the time when we go on calls we are going solely on information they provide us."



At WKU, in addition to having access to law enforcement databases, dispatchers also have access to most of the campus' 800 security cameras. So when Gray says that dispatchers are often an officer's eyes, he means that in a literal sense.

Dispatcher Connie Myers said when any law enforcement officer is answering a call anywhere near a WKU camera, the dispatchers there watch over them. It is not uncommon for dispatchers to watch a pursuit and provide location information and suspect descriptions to officers.

Myers and Jenny Puckett, who works as a dispatcher part time at WKU and full time at the WCSO, enjoy helping people and looking out for officers' safety.

"Knowing at the end of the day that you've helped someone and to me knowing, that all officers go home safe is" job satisfaction, Puckett said.

WKU police Chief Mitch Walker said dispatchers fill a vital role.

"The telecommunicators here, we couldn't do our job without them," he said. "They do a lot of work behind the scenes. They are answering calls or taking calls on the radio. They are doing this job to keep us safe.

“I wouldn’t do this job without a telecommunicator. They are certainly one of the most vital parts of the police department, and many times we take them for granted.

“Dispatchers are that calming voice. They are the first contact in an emergency situation. They are helpful and reassuring,” Walker said.

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Night editor and senior writer Deborah Highland is a veteran journalist with 23 years of experience writing and editing both community and metropolitan newspapers. She has also developed websites and co-hosted a political talk show.