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A little over a year ago I transitioned to the RCC's director's seat after 9 years in the dispatch center. A few months prior our previous director moved on to start a new career. Scott Adkins our county administrator took on the role as interim director to provide a guiding hand where he could, but relying on several of us senior personnel to keep the ship on course. Our center was just starting to recover from a serious and somewhat extended staffing shortage. At one point we had only 4 dispatchers available to provide 24 hour coverage in the PSAP. Not an adventure we'd like to repeat by any means.

After being asked several times to consider taking the job (and several "no thanks") by the county administration and several of my fellow dispatchers, they wore me down and I tossed my hat in the ring. It seemed no one really wanted the job, and now here we are.

One of the first things on my plate was to get two newly hired dispatchers into the training pipeline. We also had to get the staff trained to incorporate the new Emergency Fire Dispatch protocols in the center. The first few months were a blur working to get the new hires trained, catching up on our QA and simply figuring out the ins and outs of the job. Unfortunately both new hires resigned, setting us back. Our staff took up the slack and we were able to hire another two new dispatchers who are working out well. Historically our staff turnover rate has been very high and we never seemed to be fully staffed for long. Our newest dispatchers are fitting in well.

By providing historical data on the ever increasing call volume and added dispatching duties, we've been able to increase our staffing level from eight to ten dispatchers. One will transition into a full time Quality Assurance position who will focus much of her time to ensure our medical and fire calls are reviewed properly and in accordance to statute while cutting down on overtime costs and being able to fill in as needed. We are fortunate to have the support of the county administration, commission and agencies we serve to allow us the opportunity to provide the best service possible.

Last year we handled 15948 calls to 911, an 8.74% increase over the previous year. This placed us in the middle of the pack of all of our state PSAPs, with typically only two dispatchers on at any given time. Our staff also handled over 88,000 non-emergency line calls, countless walk in traffic for the Sheriff's Office, and dispatched for 27 Fire Departments, 4 Police Departments and 6 EMS Services.

We are fortunate to not only be looking at potential staffing increases, but also an increase in the physical space of the RCC. There are a few concepts floating around, and we're working with an architect to develop a plan not only to stretch out a little now but with an eye to the future. In the past

two years we've added overnight dispatching duties for the City of Ellsworth's police and fire departments. With the ever constant talk and pressure of consolidation of services in one form or another, we are planning now to be ready if or when it happens down the road. We have a few agencies inquiring about adding dispatching services with us. We want to be able to provide the best service to potential agencies without reducing effectiveness to our current ones. I believe we are on the right track.

Just prior to taking over the center while we were still short handed, I had a conversation about staffing, out of control working hours and call volume with a dispatcher from another agency. After several comments about how their center wouldn't be able to handle it, she asked how we managed to continue to function. My short answer was "it needs to be done, so we just do it". It's really a reflection of our entire staff in doing what needs to be done when the days are dark and the chips are down. My staff has been supportive (and tolerant) of my move from the dispatch chair to "the office". Our partner agencies have been equally supporting and continue to offer commentary on how well they feel our agency is doing these days. The overall "vibe" in the dispatch center has changed dramatically. What used to be a feeling of numb dread has evolved into a relaxed atmosphere with more laughter, cooperation with less stress and improved communications.

In the last year there have been numerous people try to give me all the credit for how well things are going with our agency. My typical answer is the staff is the reason why things are going well. I stay out of their way, let them do their jobs, empower them to make decisions, listen to them and try to give them what they need to do the job and treat them like they matter. They are the ones making things happen. I look forward to the future as we work toward growing and improving.