Washington County Declares April 11 – 17, 2010, Public Safety Telecommunicators' Week

The week of April 11 – 17, 2010, was declared National Public Safety Telecommunicators' Week (NTW) across the country. NTW is sponsored by the Association of Public Safety Communications Officials (APCO) International to honor the many telecommunications professionals who aid in providing 9-1-1 emergency assistance to citizens everywhere. It was first conceived by Patricia Anderson of the Contra Costa County (Calif.) Sheriff's Office in 1981 and was observed only at that agency for three years. Members of the Virginia and North Carolina chapters of the Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials (APCO) became involved in the mid-1980s. By the early 1990s, the national APCO organization convinced Congress of the need for a formal proclamation. Rep. Edward J. Markey (D-Mass.) introduced what became H.J. Res. 284 to create "National Public Safety Telecommunicator Week." According to Congressional procedure, it was introduced twice more in 1993 and 1994, and then became permanent, without the need for yearly introduction.

Every day, millions of people depend on the skill, expertise, and commitment of public safety telecommunications professionals to help save countless lives by dispatching emergency professionals and equipment as well as providing moral support to citizens in distress. Communications officers are the lifeline for public safety. They dispatch the calls that are taken for deputies, police officers, fire fighters, and EMS. In addition, they monitor the field unit's radio traffic, respond to their individual requests, and still answer the 9-1-1 and non-emergency lines. 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 the seemingly nameless, faceless individuals who answer 9-1-1 calls until they experience actual emergencies themselves. They make the difference between life and death in many instances.

In an effort to express sincere gratitude for the outstanding job done by the telecommunicators of Washington County Central Communications, a two of events were held to honor and recognize them. On Wednesday, April 14, 2010, a cookout was held at Central Communications. Though everyone did not necessarily get to sit down at the same table and eat at the same time, those attending got to spend some time together and even relieve those that were working to grab a bite to eat and join in the fellowship for a little while. Sheriff Fred Newman, Captain Blake Andis, and Emergency Management Coordinator Pokey Harris also provided the telecommunicators with gifts of appreciation that included gift certificates to Cracker Barrel and dispatch themed lunch bags, tumblers, lanyards, and pens. Captain Andis's wife Kim provided a very special surprise of a cake decorated as a "Cake of Appreciation."

On Thursday, April 15, the Washington County Board of Supervisors proclaimed the week as Telecommunicators' Week in the county by formally approving a resolution recognizing the telecommunicators at the board meeting that night. Eight of seventeen telecommunicators, with time of service ranging from four months to thirty-seven and half years, were in attendance to have the resolution read and proclaimed. Special arrangements were made to have deputies man the telephones and radios at Central Communications so that the dispatchers scheduled to work could be in attendance. Those attending the presentation were Rick Woelkers, Catherine Scyphers, Frankie Hutton, Missie Cullop, Pam Dickey, Bryan Blevins, Brandi Dula, and Becky Hayter. Accepting the framed resolution on behalf of the Central Communications staff was Becky Hayter. This was truly befitting as Ms. Hayter has served Washington County and its residents for nearly 38 years.

The Washington County Department of Emergency Management, Washington County Sheriff's Office, Washington County Board of Supervisors, and Washington County Administrative Office would very much like to thank each and every one of its telecommunicators for the job they do, and to each of them acknowledge that it takes a very special person to want to do YOUR job. YOU are not "just" dispatchers. YOU make a difference. YOU are responsible for saving lives and property. YOU are silent heroes. You are unseen guardian angels. YOU truly are the first, first responders.



Pictured from left to right are Rick Woelkers, Catherine Scyphers, Frankie Hutton, Missie Cullop, Pam Dickey, Bryan Blevins, Brandi Dula, and Becky Hayter.



Cake baked especially for the dispatchers at Washington County Central Communications by Kim Andis, wife of Captain Blake Andis.