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## Emergency Center Express

### **In The News – June 2007**

#### **Phone system hits second glitch; third try comes today**

By JOHN T. EBERTH, *Olean Times Herald* 05/04/2007

OLEAN — For the second time Thursday, the city was forced to backtrack on a plan to use an automated answering system for non-emergency police and fire calls.

Mayor David Carucci said the system began taking calls Thursday at 2:45 p.m. It was shut down before 5 p.m.

Mayor Carucci said while testing the system it was discovered that if more than one call was made at the same time, the second call was sent to a voice mailbox that no one knew how to retrieve messages from.

“We tested everything else and it worked. We just had this one glitch,” he said.

Mayor Carucci said the problem will be fixed sometime today and the system will be tested again. Once it’s working, the system will be left in place.

The city’s emergency dispatch center is being cut from two dispatchers per shift to one to save \$80,922 in the city budget that takes effect June 1. To ensure the remaining dispatcher can focus on emergency calls, the city is adopting the automated answering system for all seven-digit, non-emergency police and fire calls.

Mayor Carucci said the entire city building will sometime soon adopt an automated telephone answering system just as schools and most businesses have.

“With less and less bodies, we have less and less people to answer the phones,” he said. Tips are often called into the Police Department’s non-emergency number at 376-5678. Once the system is working, when someone calls that number an automated operator will offer a series of transfer and voice-mail options for different units within the department. Some of those voice-mail options would be the Criminal Unit or the Street Crimes Unit. Similar voice-mail options will be offered when someone calls the fire department’s non-emergency number at 376-5609. R> The first voice prompt from the system directs callers to dial “1” in case of an emergency. Mayor Carucci said the option was provided for callers who inadvertently dial the seven-digit number instead of 911 when they have a police or fire emergency. Dialing “1” automatically sends the call to the County 911 Center in Little Valley. The county dispatch center has been receiving all city 911 calls since January.



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Mayor Carucci said dialing the seven-digit number for police and fire isn't a good idea if someone has an emergency at home. This will only slow police and fire response times. "If they have an emergency and dial 911, they'll still talk to a person," he said. "But calling one of the seven-digit numbers for an emergency isn't going to help them. When people have a legitimate emergency, they should dial 911." BR> The city had planned to test the new answering system last Friday but postponed the test until a separate non-emergency telephone line for deaf telephone typewriter (TTY) users could be installed. The non-emergency telephone number for TTY users is 373-3143.

Since former Mayor William Quinlan's administration, the city has tried to eliminate its dispatch service and let the county's 911 Center in Little Valley handle Olean's police and fire calls. But someone is needed to check on prisoners held in the Olean City Jail, which is part of Olean Police Department as is the Olean dispatch office.

Right now, city dispatchers are required to check on prisoners who are sober every 30 minutes. They are required to check the welfare of intoxicated prisoners every 15 minutes. The state Commission of Corrections set the requirement in 2004 following the hanging deaths of men in the city jail in 2002 and 2003.

Both men were brought to the jail following driving-while-intoxicated arrests and both cooperated with police during processing and showed no signs of being suicidal.

City police officers are not available to monitor prisoners because they are on patrol.

## **What Does This Mean For You?**

The city of Olean has the same challenges most of us have. How do you provide the best possible service in the face of increasing pressures on the budget? Responding to E9-1-1 and non-emergency telecommunication needs involves multiple interactions between many organizations and groups, often under pressure. When everything works well, citizens are happy, but often not vocal. On the other hand, even a slight problem can raise concerned voices and be played out in the media.

We are all in a changing environment and we are all very much in the public eye when things go wrong. When a change is made to one part of a system, a slight oversight can lead to major problems somewhere else. Any mis-step can go public in no time.

In order to cut a dispatcher, Olean's solution was to install an automated telephone answering system for non-emergency calls. Not a bad idea ... except that something went wrong. Subsequently a newspaper article was published, citizens needed reassurance, and possibly the people who installed the system had some embarrassing questions to answer. (continued)



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So what do we need to do? Olean's response was a good one: get out there immediately, explain what happened, and reassure the public. An even better answer is to avoid the problem. For that you need additional information about how your systems are working today. What are the demands? How are you doing? Where are potential trouble spots building and where are you doing well? If you make a change, will your planned improvement stand up to your expectations?

If you don't know how you are doing before a change, you leave yourself open to costly errors. You may be creating problems you didn't have before.

## **Bell Services West Will Help**

A new telecommunications system is a challenge. You need to create a baseline of your system, whether you're thinking of a new system, consolidation, or want to evaluate your current system. Bell Services West's [Performance Benchmark](#) service has reports that aren't available from any other reporting system or service. We don't just provide reports, we give you an analysis of the data, with recommendations based on that information. Take a look at our [Performance Benchmark reports](#).

We also offer daily and monthly reports with our [E91-1- Monitoring System](#) which gives you customized data on a regular basis, to let you know when a change to your telecommunications system should be considered.

For only \$500, our [E9-1-1 Performance Benchmark Service](#) gives you unbiased proof of your center's staffing requirements. These are reports you can use to obtain grants or request additional staff budget.