

MEMO FROM THE MAYOR

SUBJECT: WHEN “JUST DOING ONE’S JOB” DOESN’T GET NOTICED—BUT IT SHOULD

Over the years I’ve had the pleasure of acknowledging selfless and courageous deeds performed by first responders from various law enforcement, emergency medical, and fire-fighting agencies. Sadly, in each of these events, I failed to mention the work done by the 911 operator at Gem County Dispatch taking the initial call, who then directs the applicable agency(ies) to the scene of the emergency. Accordingly, my intent in this first Memo of 2021 is to fix that oversight. Therefore, what follows is not so much a New Year’s Resolution Memo so much as a New Year’s *Mea Culpa* Memo.

Let’s be clear; typically, a person does not call a 911 operator to ask what’s playing at the local movie theater or to catch up on gossip. They call because they are directly involved in—or at least perceive they are experiencing (or observing)—a true emergency. Certainly, our two county fire districts and city fire, as well, get their share of calls when someone burns a pile of wood or other nasty combustibles but fails to get permission or to notify county dispatch of the burning. Nevertheless, the majority of callers correctly perceive a real emergency that must be reported, and so they do.

Not surprisingly, if we didn’t have competent 911 operators taking the calls, that is, ones who, in their own mind’s eye, have the ability to correctly paint the picture to pass on to the applicable agency selected for response, all based on an emotionally-distraught caller trying to describe the emergency in question—often, inartfully and sometimes even a child—the “second” first-responders would be unable to arrive with all the information needed to succeed upon arrival. Happily, Lt. Lisa Resinkin, head dispatcher of the Gem County Sheriff Dispatch Center, ably achieves the hard task of attracting and training qualified individuals to handle the tricky job of becoming 911 operators.

It takes at least six months, and commonly, more than six, for a rookie to be adequately trained and to acquire the muscle memory to begin the development into a first-class 911 operator. Not only is Lt. Resinkin required to find qualified personnel, she has to essentially train them on-the-job, all the while keeping their morale up to allow the operators to remain positive about life and not walk off during a shift.

In recent years, in larger states, some 911 operators have become so distraught over mistakes they made resulting in one or more deaths, they themselves have taken their own lives! Remember, people don't call because they're having a great day. Further, Lt. Resinkin must marshal the kind of equipment that won't bankrupt the county, yet allows an already slim staff to perform their tasks efficiently and with a modicum of errors.

At the last city council meeting in December, I had the privilege to honor several law enforcement personnel from three different agencies, along with two public works employees as first responders, and included three civilian medical providers who represented Valley Family Health Care. They received their recognition for the outstanding job they performed in efficiently and effectively mitigating a situation involving a threat of extreme bodily harm by an individual at the health care clinic. All the while I worked on the certificates to honor these outstanding professionals, I had a gnawing sensation there existed another story not adequately being told.

After the clerk published the agenda for the council meeting, it occurred to me that I had not sufficiently dealt with the FIRST first-responder: dispatch in general, and the dispatcher on duty during the event, in particular: Lt. Lisa Resinkin.

Recall, the incident happened on November 11th, Veterans Day, a federal holiday honored by our state. Lt. Resinkin worked alone, as she often does, on that holiday's day-shift. Nevertheless, in her going-on-three-decades as a dispatcher, she has confronted similar issues before, thus making her "muscle memory" pretty good. When she took the initial call from the clinic practice manager, who was able to give Lt. Resinkin an accurate picture of the nature of the threat to use deadly force on the staff and patients at the facility, Resinkin's training and experience kicked in and she went to work.

Resinkin told the practice manager that all staff and patients needed to get out of the clinic and away from the building as soon as possible in the least noticeable way to the individual making the threat. Once accomplished, Resinkin told the manager to use her cell phone to call dispatch again. Since the clinic already had a plan in place for such an eventuality, staff was able to accomplish the exit of the building of all personnel, save the individual making the threat, in under three minutes. This constitutes a remarkable feat in itself. Several new staff members came on board just before the event and such emergency exit had never been practiced! Yet, the clinic's professional staff accomplished it flawlessly the first time.

During the egress movement, Resinkin immediately put out a call to all available law enforcement units in the area to respond. Based upon Resinkin's call, Emmett Police Chief Steve Kunka immediately asked Reserve Officer Mike Knittel to respond along with Clint Seamons and Ken Purdy of Emmett Public Works to deploy street closed signs at the 12th intersections with Washington and S. Johns. He also asked City Fire to be on standby at the Tractor Supply Parking lot. Emmett Deputy Chief Babcock, first to arrive and establish a joint command center, asked for a Fire District 1 EMT crew stand by at the same location.

At this point, the practice manager for the clinic called back Lt. Resinkin to keep her informed about the clinic staff and patients, thus allowing Resinkin to convey additional advice to them. It would seem that such communication would be quite enough for one person. But this is the Paul Harvey moment for the Rest of the Story. During this event, Lt. Resinkin was dealing with two traffic accidents on SH 16, not to mention the myriad of less-than-critically-thinking callers dinging dispatch about what all the hullabaloo was about on 12th Street.

Kind of makes the Full-time Dispatch Position Application provision, "Must be able to work in a high stress environment and must be multi-task oriented" seem like an understatement, doesn't it? Thank you, Lt. Resinkin, for a job well done. Happy New Year, everyone!