

911 Call Audio ([00:07](#)):

Winchester 911. What is the address of your emergency? Okay. Tell me exactly what happened. Hold on. Just a moment while I get them on the way. Do you want me to stay on the phone? Yeah. Hold on. Just a moment. I'm gonna give you CPR instruction. They're pulling up outside. They're just gonna get some stuff and come in. Just keep going until they take over.

Dan Hoffman ([00:28](#)):

Welcome to part two of the Rouss Review. Our City Works portion of the show. I'm still your City Manager, Dan Hoffman, and Amy Simmons is still the Communications Director.

Amy Simmons ([00:37](#)):

And I'm still giggling.

Dan Hoffman ([00:37](#)):

You're still giggling. So let's let's cut right to it. We've got an important guest who needs to get back to the Emergency Communication Center. Okay. And welcome. We have our guest with us. Why don't you introduce yourself?

Terri Mellott ([00:51](#)):

My name's Terri Mellott and I work in the Emergency Communication Center for the City.

Dan Hoffman ([00:56](#)):

All right. So Emergency Communication Center. We call it the ECC around City Hall. For the laymen out there, it's 911, right?

Terri Mellott ([01:05](#)):

Right.

Dan Hoffman ([01:06](#)):

So you work for 911, although it sounds kind of funny. No one works for 911.

Amy Simmons ([01:09](#)):

No. It's a service.

Dan Hoffman ([01:11](#)):

Oh, you work at 911. It's not even a place. It's a service. It's a number.

Terri Mellott ([01:16](#)):

I just tell people, I answer phones for a living.

Dan Hoffman ([01:18](#)):

There you go.

Amy Simmons ([01:20](#)):

Dispatcher's another.

Dan Hoffman ([01:21](#)):

Dispatcher. I'm a dispatcher. But even that, you could be a dispatcher for like the Amazon warehouse or something. You dispatch pretty important people in very sensitive situations because it's 911. So how long have you been with the City? How long you been doing this?

Terri Mellott ([01:40](#)):

I'm 19 years in and this September will be my 20th anniversary.

Dan Hoffman ([01:46](#)):

Wow. And you've been a dispatcher the entire time?

Terri Mellott ([01:50](#)):

Yes.

Dan Hoffman ([01:52](#)):

That is impressive.

Amy Simmons ([01:53](#)):

It is so impressive.

Dan Hoffman ([01:54](#)):

It is very impressive because I don't think a lot of people realize how easy it is to burn out in this profession. And, , how someone might enter into the field and within six months...We have people that don't even make it through training, and you've been at it for 20 years. What is the success rate typically? I don't expect you to rattle off figures, but it's common. Right?

Terri Mellott ([02:22](#)):

Very. When we get trainees in, if we get three or four of 'em, maybe one will make it.

Dan Hoffman ([02:29](#)):

Wow.

Terri Mellott ([02:31](#)):

And if they can make it to five years, that's awesome.

Dan Hoffman ([02:34](#)):

That's incredible. And you made it to 20.

Amy Simmons ([02:38](#)):

<Laughs> She's a special breed.

Dan Hoffman ([02:38](#)):

That, yeah. What do you think? That's a great point. What do you think it takes? What kind of personality traits?

Terri Mellott ([02:46](#)):

We have all different kinds of personality traits in the center. I think the underlying thing is to care about people and want to help them, despite the fact that you're not always appreciated. And for me, the people out on the street, the guys that I'm dispatching, and girls, to make sure they go home safe. That's the number one thing for me is just making sure that happens.

Amy Simmons ([03:16](#)):

You gotta really be strong emotionally. I could not handle that.

Dan Hoffman ([03:19](#)):

You're getting phone calls from people that are all having really bad days. No one's ever calling up 911 just saying, 'Hey, it's all cool.' 'Thanks.' 'Hey, just calling up, see how you're doing Miss Mellott.' Like, no, you're getting people that are having...

Terri Mellott ([03:34](#)):

The worst day of their life.

Dan Hoffman ([03:35](#)):

Worst day of their life. Yeah.

Amy Simmons ([03:40](#)):

Then, you're sending your co-workers and the people you work with into dangerous situations potentially.

Dan Hoffman ([03:44](#)):

Yeah. It's different in every jurisdiction where the dispatch center is in relation to the officers. Larger jurisdictions, you might not get a chance to really know a lot of the officers in the field. You know a number or unit, but here, we're small enough that you know all our police officers.

Terri Mellott ([04:05](#)):

Yeah. And we know the officers. We know when they're having children. They've got small kids at home. A lot of times because it is a small area, their wife or significant other will work in the city or will be familiar with them, too. So it makes it a lot more personal.

Dan Hoffman ([04:24](#)):

And it's not just police.

Amy Simmons ([04:26](#)):

I was getting ready to say. <Laughs>

Dan Hoffman ([04:27](#)):

It's fire and rescue as well. You guys dispatch really based on the...well, I'm not gonna try to explain it. You explain it. Call comes in. 'Hey, I've got a...' Amy, give me a common [call].

Amy Simmons ([04:42](#)):

Heart attack?

Dan Hoffman ([04:43](#)):

Amy Simmons is having a heart attack.

Amy Simmons ([04:46](#)):

It's cause I have to work with him.

Dan Hoffman ([04:46](#)):

<Laughs> Easy. Amy Simmons calls in, 'Oh, my chest really hurts. I've got shortness of breath.'

Terri Mellott ([04:56](#)):

Where are you at? That is the most important thing. That piece of information we need to, so I can send you somebody else.

Dan Hoffman ([05:02](#)):

'I'm at 123 Communications Lane.' What happens next?

Terri Mellott ([05:07](#)):

I'm gonna verify that, and then I'm gonna start questioning. We have an emergency medical dispatch program that we go through. People get frustrated with us sometimes because we're asking basic questions. Are they awake? Are they breathing? And they're just saying, send somebody, just send somebody, and they don't understand. I need to know what code to use to send somebody to you.

Dan Hoffman ([05:31](#)):

Talk about those codes. How many codes do you have to...Oh. They can't see your facial expression right now, but it's not good. You've got a lot of codes. What are the codes?

Terri Mellott ([05:42](#)):

The codes are the call type that we have to use. For police, it's a lot more basic, but for fire and rescue, it's very specific and the priority with which they respond is based on that code. So the quicker you can answer our questions, you know, if they're having chest pains, if they have a cardiac history, are they having difficulty breathing? We have to go through all those, plus the extra added codes, or questions because COVID. But once we get that, and we've got people on the way to you, I'm gonna go through an aspirin diagnostic and see if we can start giving the aspirin to help her before the paramedics get there.

Amy Simmons ([06:28](#)):

Does the code also help determine what equipment they need to bring or personnel?

Dan Hoffman ([06:33](#)):

Yes. It determines if you're getting just a medic, if you're getting a medic with fire truck, if you're getting the Battalion Chief responding also. And also if their responding emergency or non-emergency.

Dan Hoffman ([06:44](#)):

All right. Let's do another scenario. This is fun. All right. I'm the caller. You're the dispatcher. How do you answer?

Terri Mellott ([06:53](#)):

What is the address of your emergency?

Dan Hoffman ([06:55](#)):

I'm standing on an intersection Jubal Early and South Loudoun.

Terri Mellott ([06:59](#)):

Jubal Early and Loudoun?

Dan Hoffman ([07:00](#)):

Yep. I just saw a car accident.

Terri Mellott ([07:02](#)):

Is anybody injured?

Dan Hoffman ([07:03](#)):

I don't know. Maybe. I'm gonna go over and see.

Terri Mellott ([07:06](#)):

Okay. I'm gonna ask you is there any smoke or fire or fluids leaking?

Dan Hoffman ([07:10](#)):

Yes. There's a bunch of fluids leaking and smoke coming from the engine.

Terri Mellott ([07:15](#)):

All right. And are the people able to get out of the vehicle?

Dan Hoffman ([07:17](#)):

I'm not sure. Gonna walk over right now.

Terri Mellott ([07:20](#)):

All right. And while you're doing that, we're getting fire and rescue on the way, police officers.

Dan Hoffman ([07:25](#)):

How are you doing that? So that's another thing. Every time I've done a quote, unquote ride-along, even though we're not riding anywhere, I've sat in dispatch centers. It's always fascinating that you're doing like five things at once. So we're gonna pause this scenario for a second. You've got this caller on the line. That guy is probably doing something dumb. He's gonna go over and try to be the hero and pull people out of a car accident. You're trying to talk to that person at the same time you're trying to get the units there. How are you doing that?

Terri Mellott ([08:00](#)):

I'm gonna ask you to please be patient and hold while I'm getting them on the way. That way you understand why there's silence. I'm not ignoring you. I've not hung up on you. Like you said, I'm doing five other things at the same time. So hopefully, they are understanding. A lot of times they keep talking and I'm trying to listen to you while I'm talking on the radio, just so I can pick up on those extra things.

Dan Hoffman ([08:27](#)):

And so you're listening to me outta one ear. You're dispatching out of the other and you're typing at the same time. Right? Cause you're having to code, put this into a system.

Terri Mellott ([08:38](#)):

Yes.

Dan Hoffman ([08:39](#)):

Talk about the system. It's a very complicated...

Amy Simmons ([08:43](#)):

Elaborate.

Dan Hoffman ([08:43](#)):

Elaborate system.

Terri Mellott ([08:43](#)):

We just call it the CAD, which is computer aided dispatching. And it just helps us out. It will tell us who to send once we put the address in and the code. Also, for the new people coming in that haven't done this, once you put the code in, it pops up with key questions to make sure that you're getting that information.

Amy Simmons ([09:10](#)):

Do you have all those memorized by these 20 years?

Terri Mellott ([09:13](#)):

Not all of them cause keep changing on us every once in a while.

Dan Hoffman ([09:16](#)):

That's true. Gotta keep you on your toes. All right. So back to the call. So, you have dispatched. Someone's on the way. I'm walking over to the car, and I see somebody in the car. They seem to be awake or somewhat awake. I'm gonna pull 'em out through the window.

Terri Mellott ([09:37](#)):

Unless they're in immediate danger, please don't move them.

Dan Hoffman ([09:41](#)):

Got it. There you go. Let's say, and I'm not gonna try to be a hysterical person on this, but let's say the person's hysterical. In any situation, whether they've witnessed an accident or whether they're just in their home and they're having an emergency, how do you deal with the really amped up or hysterical folks?

Terri Mellott ([10:02](#)):

Repetitive persistence is the term that we use. Calm voice. And you repeat the same thing over and over. Tell me where you're at. Please, I need you to tell me where you're at. I'm gonna send you help, but tell me where you're at. Until we get that information.

Dan Hoffman ([10:24](#)):

Fascinating.

Terri Mellott ([10:27](#)):

And the calmer you stay, hopefully that calms them down, too.

Dan Hoffman ([10:31](#)):

Calms them. Got it. So, once they're off the line and let's say it was a really emotional call. Let's say somebody had passed or you're drained. Right? How do you guys cope with that? What things do you have in place to make sure that your own mental health and the mental health of your dispatchers is still cared for?

Terri Mellott ([11:02](#)):

Well, the City has done great strides in trying to help us with giving us Leslie at the Police Department. That's always there if you do need to talk to her. I know for me, my faith plays a big part in it. Knowing that whatever's happened, God was in control of that and everything happens for a reason, which I try to practice in my own life. That's helps me to calm down and a lot of prayer. Sometimes just asking him to help me let things go, because I am a very emotional person, and there are times that it's harder to let things go.

Dan Hoffman ([11:46](#)):

That's good. Everyone needs their their way in which they can cope and process. Interesting. So it is...what month is this?

Amy Simmons ([11:58](#)):

April.

Dan Hoffman ([11:59](#)):

April. I know that. <Laughs> But it's this month that's Emergency Communications Month, right?

Amy Simmons ([12:06](#)):

I think so. That's why we're here.

Dan Hoffman ([12:09](#)):

Got it. I thought so. That's why I was like, I'm pretty sure it wasn't last month there was something that we were doing that was last month that we did a week or two late, but anyways, irrelevant. So, it is Emergency Communications Month.

Amy Simmons ([12:22](#)):

There's a specific week for it. It's right around this timeframe.

Dan Hoffman ([12:25](#)):

You guys deserve a month.

Amy Simmons ([12:26](#)):

Yes. Absolutely.

Terri Mellott ([12:29](#)):

Next week.

Dan Hoffman ([12:30](#)):

Next week, thank you very much. So next week is Emergency Communications Week.

Amy Simmons ([12:36](#)):

Second week in April.

Dan Hoffman ([12:37](#)):

The second week in April. So it's a good opportunity for all of us to, aside from listening to things like this and becoming a little more aware of how it works. And you should take a little bit of time, learn the process, learn the role, because dispatchers, they're not out there in front. We give a ton of well-deserved attention to our police officers and our firefighters because they're the ones who their lives are on the line, and all that. But you guys play a huge role in making sure that they get home safely, to your point. But also as we talked about, there is a toll. There is a stress that this places on the dispatchers too because you're being confronted with really upset people. It's why it's hard to get people into the profession. It's hard to keep them in the profession.

Terri Mellott ([13:43](#)):

It is.

Dan Hoffman ([13:44](#)):

We have openings right now. We've got a hiring bonus that I believe we put in place.

Terri Mellott ([13:53](#)):

Yes.

Dan Hoffman ([13:54](#)):

Are you familiar with that amount. I don't have that dollar amount. Is it \$2,500 or \$1,000?

Terri Mellott ([14:00](#)):

\$2500 and a thousand, if you recommend somebody and then they get hired.

Dan Hoffman ([14:02](#)):

That's right. It's an employee referral program, but that's just eligible for City employees. Any of the City employees that listen to this, there's a thousand bucks in it if you know somebody that could be a dispatcher. But anybody that applies and sticks through the process and becomes one of our dispatchers, it's a \$2,500 signing bonus. And we're hiring just dispatchers, now? Are we hiring...do you have any supervisory? Well, supervisors, they would be hired from elsewhere or from within.

Terri Mellott ([14:31](#)):

Yeah, you have to have five years of experience to become a supervisor. And our supervisor staff is fully staffed at this time, until she gets that other position she's wanting.

Dan Hoffman ([14:40](#)):

Oh, right. Yeah. We're making a few changes there. We're adjusting the pay scale a little bit, and of course, if this budget passes, there's gonna be a bump for everybody. So go to our website if you're interested in in doing this. What else? Anything that I've missed? What else is important for people to know about being a dispatcher?

Terri Mellott ([15:05](#)):

I think totally off from not being a dispatcher. But people don't realize we're not considered public safety personnel either.

Dan Hoffman ([15:17](#)):

Really?

Amy Simmons ([15:18](#)):

How is that possible?

Dan Hoffman ([15:18](#)):

I consider that.

Amy Simmons ([15:19](#)):

Yeah.

Terri Mellott ([15:20](#)):

Through the State, we are actually considered clerical workers. We have to do the entire 30 years. Oh. Instead of [20].

Dan Hoffman ([15:29](#)):

Huh.

Terri Mellott ([15:30](#)):

They're in the process of trying to get that change through the State, which I think would be a great benefit and would help people to stay.

Dan Hoffman ([15:40](#)):

Yeah. That's a State thing not a City thing, people. Don't blame the City. Thank you.

Amy Simmons ([15:44](#)):

That makes zero sense because they're providing advice to those callers.

Terri Mellott ([15:48](#)):

Yeah. We always say we're the first, first responders.

Amy Simmons ([15:52](#)):

You're walking people through CPR and instructions to keep people alive.

Terri Mellott ([15:58](#)):

And it's frustrating to us cuz people call in, 'oh, there's a wreck'. And we're like, 'do you see the fire truck there? We sent them.'

Dan Hoffman ([16:06](#)):

Yeah.

Terri Mellott ([16:07](#)):

A lot of people don't realize that.

Dan Hoffman ([16:11](#)):

That's a really good point.

Amy Simmons ([16:12](#)):

And they do more than just emergency, too. I mean, you're answering other kind of calls.

Terri Mellott ([16:17](#)):

Yes. We do all business lines. At the same time, we're working on warrant entries, running criminal histories.

Dan Hoffman ([16:25](#)):

Yeah, thank you. So, one other interesting tidbit before we wrap up, cause I know you gotta get back. We've talked a lot about your interactions with people who are calling 911, but what about your interaction with fire or with police? Tell me a little bit about the types of things that you as a dispatcher, what requests are you getting from our police officers per se?

Terri Mellott ([16:52](#)):

What requests are we getting?

Dan Hoffman ([16:53](#)):

Yeah. They're behind a vehicle, they're in the field. What kind of questions do they ask you? What do you do for them in that case?

Terri Mellott ([17:01](#)):

Well, if they're on a traffic stop, depending on if they can run their own information. If they have their mobiles, but if their mobiles aren't working, we're running the people they come in contact [with]. We are making sure that there's no warrants on them or that they're not wanted by any other agencies. We're looking up addresses, finding out where people live, so they can go and try to make contact.

Amy Simmons ([17:28](#)):

If they need backup or more personnel.

Terri Mellott ([17:30](#)):

Yeah, if they need backup, they need anything, we're sending that. We're making phone calls for them. Getting key holders for both sides.

Amy Simmons ([17:39](#)):

And that non-emergency number is constantly ringing, isn't it?

Terri Mellott ([17:44](#)):

Yes. During the day you're doing a lot of transferring. We are the main number for the Police Department. So, we're transferring to records, transferring to property, transferring to admin. And that's why a lot of people get frustrated cuz they're like, 'well, I called the non-emergency line.' But they don't understand when we're going, 'do you have an emergency? I need you to hold.' And putting 'em on hold because of the fact there could be five 911 lines ringing. There's an accident in a major intersection, and we've got two people working.

Dan Hoffman ([18:16](#)):

Gotcha. How many people do we normally have in the dispatch center? In the ECC?

Terri Mellott ([18:22](#)):

We like to have three. One to handle all the police radios, one for fire and rescue, one for the phone calls. That [person] would be the first one to take phone calls, but we're all answering the phones at any given time.

Dan Hoffman ([18:37](#)):

So thank you. I know you gotta get back, so, we'll wrap it up. But thank you very much. Everybody out there, if you see or if you know somebody that's a dispatcher pass along your gratitude. Say thank you. It is Emergency Communications Week. Tell 'em Thank you. And thank you for coming and spending a little time with us.

Terri Mellott ([19:58](#)):

You're welcome.

Dan Hoffman ([19:59](#)):

Now. Get back to answering phones.

Terri Mellott ([20:00](#)):

I will.

Dan Hoffman ([20:01](#)):

<Laughs> Thank you.

Terri Mellott ([20:01](#)):

You're welcome.

Dan Hoffman ([20:08](#)):

So there goes Terry. Terry's going right back to work

Amy Simmons ([20:11](#)):

In a hurry. <Laughs>

Dan Hoffman ([20:12](#)):

Yeah. She's telling us on the way out that this week is Emergency Communications Week

Amy Simmons ([20:20](#)):

Appreciation week I think it's called.

Dan Hoffman ([20:21](#)):

Called Emergency Communications Appreciation.

Amy Simmons ([20:23](#)):

It's either appreciation or recognition, one of those.

Dan Hoffman ([20:25](#)):

Awareness.

Amy Simmons ([20:25](#)):

I don't think it's awareness.

Dan Hoffman ([20:26](#)):

It's one of those. It's got a week.

Amy Simmons ([20:27](#)):

It's got a special week.

Dan Hoffman ([20:28](#)):

It's got a special week. And they get to kind of as a reward or a little benefit, they get to wear what they want. They get to dress up.

Amy Simmons ([20:38](#)):

And she's so excited.

Dan Hoffman ([20:39](#)):

And she's excited cuz she gets to wear her pajamas. Which is fantastic.

Amy Simmons ([20:42](#)):

Said it's her favorite day of the year?

Dan Hoffman ([20:44](#)):

Favorite day of the year. And I can get that. Oh, if I could wear my pajama to work, I would.

Amy Simmons ([20:48](#)):

<Laughs> That would be funny.

Dan Hoffman ([20:50](#)):

Yeah. Probably would immediately enlist some type of complaint. But yeah. Terry's awesome.

Amy Simmons ([20:58](#)):

She is so knowledgeable. I don't know how she does it. 20 years?

Dan Hoffman ([21:01](#)):

Well, 20 years. I mean that's...

Amy Simmons ([21:03](#)):

I would've had a nervous breakdown multiple times by now.

Dan Hoffman ([21:05](#)):

Yeah, you would. Me too. I think after a while it's hard to not get jaded. You hear just bad stuff every day, all day.

Amy Simmons ([21:16](#)):

And I can't departmentalize...

Dan Hoffman ([21:18](#)):

Compartmentalize. Is that the word you can departmentalize things, but you're talking about compartmentalize.

Amy Simmons ([21:23](#)):

Compartmentalize. I can't, whatever the word is. I can't do it.

Dan Hoffman ([21:27](#)):

It is compartmentalize. So you're aware.

Amy Simmons ([21:28](#)):

Okay. I learned a new word. So I cannot do that. I would just be putting myself in that person's shoes or I'd be taking it home. I just can't do it.

Dan Hoffman ([21:37](#)):

Yeah. It'd be too much. So thankfully we have people like Terri.

Amy Simmons ([21:41](#)):

Hallelujah.

Dan Hoffman ([21:41](#)):

That do a great job. And again, if you're interested in...I know we've talked about how hard this job is, but it's incredibly rewarding as well.

Amy Simmons ([21:49](#)):

And important.

Dan Hoffman ([21:50](#)):

And important. So come if you're interested go to the City's website and apply.

Amy Simmons ([21:57](#)):

And they were a great group to work with. They have a lot of fun, even though they have to deal with all those hard to take situations. They are big family and they support each other.

Dan Hoffman ([22:07](#)):

And you are not clerical or administrative. I'm glad she brought that up. You are a member of the police force. You're not carrying a gun. You're not a sworn officer. Yeah, that's different. But you are, and at least in our jurisdiction, where the ECC is part of the police department, you are part of the team there. You're a first responder just like anybody else. And that work does not go unnoticed by not just the police officers, but the firefighters and paramedics in the City who also rely on them. So, and the city at

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large. Check out the website, come join us. That's all we got for today. Thanks again for listening. We appreciate you taking some time with us outta your day, and we'll talk to you next time. See you around City Hall.