



Owensboro, Kentucky - where Johnny Depp, BBQ and consolidated 9-1-1 can appear in the same sentence

You may not know much about Owensboro, Kentucky, but here are three facts that make it unforgettable: it's the barbecue capital of the country, it's the birthplace of swashbuckling actor Johnny Depp, and it just consolidated county and city 9-1-1 operations into a new central dispatch facility.

If you happen to be one of the 70,000 people calling that 9-1-1 center for help each year – it's that last item that matters most. The new Owensboro Daviess County Central Dispatch service was officially unveiled in July, and features the latest Next Generation capable 9-1-1 public safety system from Solacom Technologies.

While many counties across the country are still struggling with the concept of consolidation, Owensboro began examining the merits of amalgamating Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs) as early as 1982. It has taken 18 years, and no fewer than 8 advisory boards and 7 attempts.

So what created the 'perfect storm' for change this time around? Political will for one – with Owensboro Mayor Ron Payne and Daviess County Judge Executive Reid Haire leading their teams of elected officials, and the vision of Paul Nave, Director of the new Central Dispatch. Nave is a keen advocate of preparing now for the inevitable change that Next Generation 9-1-1 will bring.

The economy also played a key role – there's an undeniable fiscal upside to consolidating. But perhaps the most compelling argument was simply better service to the community, as Judge Executive Reid Haire explained "We can't have a situation where somebody calls the city, and they have to transfer the call to the county, and the county then has to dispatch somebody... it makes no sense."

Prior to consolidation, the PSAPs had separate locations, with 15 dispatchers working at the county site and 10 at the city. In addition to the cost of maintaining separate sites and phone lines,



A Dispatcher in the newly consolidated 9-1-1 Center for Owensboro, Kentucky.

the two PSAPs used different 911 controller systems – which inevitably added delays and complications when calls needed to be transferred between facilities.

Mayor Payne also fully supported the need to raise the level of service in the community. "The primary responsibility of government is Public Safety, and one of the most significant components of that responsibility is communication. This 911 center is the public's lifeline for assistance," said Payne.

That public includes approximately 100,000 residents and another 25,000 transient population of students and sporting event participants – Owensboro happens to be Kentucky's #1 sports town according to Sports Illustrated.

But centralizing wasn't exactly a 'slam-dunk', as Haire explained "we had to deal with personnel, we had to deal with budgets, and the old notion of merger, centralization, combining services – and there is still out in the rural area some element of suspicion about whether or not this is going to work. The proof is in the pudding, the citizens of Owensboro and Daviess County are served more swiftly and completely than they were in the past – it will save taxpayer dollars and it will save taxpayer lives."

The new Central Dispatch, located in the Owensboro City Police building, employs 25 full-time and 4 part-time dispatchers. In addition to the 70,000 9-1-1 calls, of which Nave estimates 50,000 will be wireless, the facility will receive around 200,000 administrative calls for the city and county.



The new system is a lot quicker. It's easier to function; one touch and I can transfer to just about anyone." – Dispatcher Kristie Basham

The Solacom IP-based NG9-1-1 system integrates the telephone, Computer Aided-Dispatch, workstations and other components and provides simplified administration. "The functionality is extremely easy to manage. To add buttons, add transfers – and those things are very valuable to us because if we can do something quicker we can save time and that's the essence of our job" said Nave.

Changes on the old system meant you had to go through the supplier and wait for them to complete the service, and there was always a cost for modifications. "We can modify the Solacom system ourselves – we can add a transfer button or an icon on the screen, save it, push it out to all the positions and we're done," added Nave. "It's a big benefit for us because of our stringent budget."

The Guardian Intelligent Workstations were rapidly assimilated by the dispatchers, who appreciate touch-screen capabilities and the speed of one button for everything from transferring calls to opening or closing garage doors directly from their display.

The graphical interface uses different colors to distinguish between 911 and administration calls, and custom icons for transfer keys to the various agencies – e.g. the city police line uses the Owensboro police department badge, the county sheriff line has the sheriff badge, etc. "Those types of things are not important to the system functioning but they are important to the dispatcher to delineate what line is ringing and it's just aesthetically nice for them to see that information on screen" said Nave.

As for raising the level of service, not long after the cutover date the consolidated center received a 911 call reporting a suspicious person trying to break into a vehicle at a county address bordering a city subdivision. The 9-1-1 center dispatched a county sheriff unit as they normally would, but subsequently received information that the suspect had run into the city subdivision. Within 30 seconds, central dispatch had a city patrolman en-route to that location to back up the county sheriff. They apprehended the suspect who had felony warrants out of another state. "Because we were all in the same area together and could communicate, it saved the community by arresting a felon off the street, and it could have saved an officer's life by having someone there as a backup" concluded Nave.



"There is a significant cost savings, both from attrition and consolidating services that otherwise would be duplicated, and from being able to configure and manage the system ourselves. It's a win/win for the city and the county." – Paul Nave, 9-1-1 Director Owensboro Daviess County Central Dispatch

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