

Heroes

From 1

we have to remain focused to help them.”

Walton’s supervisor, J.W. Stalls, agreed.

“You have to be able to stay collected to do this job,” she said.

Bertie County’s dispatchers work two weeks of day shift, two weeks of night shift and every other weekend.

Kena Bell joined the department in November of 2018. She admits it was a bit overwhelming at first.

“I had to get my radio ear,” Bell said. She recalled listening to the radio during training and asking, “You heard what?”

She said she may not have had “that” call yet, but she knows it is coming. That call being the one a person will never forget.

In five years, Walton had begun a list of those calls.

“The sound of gunfire while you are on the phone,” as she shook her head.

A caller to 911 was shot while she was on the line with them.

With 19 years behind her, Stalls has seen many situations come through the switchboard.

While alone at the switchboard, Stalls dispatched resources to her own sister’s wreck. She did not realize at first who the victim was. By the time she did, Stalls had no choice but to stay focused and get the job done.

As if the job were not intense enough, factor in the fact many of the dispatchers live in the county.

“That’s probably one of the hardest aspects of our job, living in the county, working

in the county and being so rural, probably 80 percent of the time you are going to know the person involved,” Stalls explained.

“It’s crazy,” Walton said. “Because with us actually living in the county and us taking calls in the county, you know half the people you talk to.”

“Just last week we took a call at a trailer park, a fire. Why would it be my grandma’s trailer park that caught on fire? You just never know,” she said.

So how do they look after one another?

“It’s a family thing,” Walton laughed.

Stalls agreed. “We are one big family.”

Each dispatcher has their own idea of what they hope the public will better understand about calling 911.

Stalls explained, “Stay calm, and don’t get frustrated with our questions, easier said than done, but we ask certain questions for certain reasons.”

Bell’s request to callers is, “Know where you are. Try your best to stay as calm as possible.”

Walton provided something to think about regarding cell phones that have been deactivated.

“Those disconnected cell phones you let your children play with them and you let your children ride the bus with them, they can still call 911,” Walton explained.

She recalled one specific incident where a child with one of those phones called throughout the morning, around 15 times.

In addition to being a great distraction, these calls tie

up one of the two incoming lines.

“I would hate to be the call that wasn’t an emergency and kept an emergency from going through,” Stalls explained.

Their superpower is multi-tasking. However, the public is asked to remember, “we are human too,” explained Bell.

Those who make up the Bertie County 911 Communications Staff are: J.W. Stalls, Wenonador Cherry, Nedra Williams, Travis Jackson, Courtney Walton, Melanie Barnes, Kayla White, Ka’Wania Parker, Brad Barnes, Melissa Hand, Joyvita Dameron, Josh Woody, Melody Spence, Kena Bell and Christian Holley.

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Asbell

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on the mostly retired population of their town.

“A lot of trust has been betrayed,” he explained. “It’s a dark spot on our little town’s history.”

Jennifer Evans, the bookkeeper hired by Powellsville who found the discrepancies leading to the investigation, also addressed the court.

“Due to Mr. Asbell’s mishandling of funds, we’ve had to adjust the water fees two different times,” she explained, directing her next comment to the judge.

“Please be firm and steadfast and hold him accountable.”

Evans explained there had been “excessive amounts of gas purchases” discovered

as well as Asbell being paid for positions other than mayor.

“It was a well premeditated scheme,” she told of Asbell.

Wes Camden, attorney for Asbell, told the court, “This has been an incredibly difficult day for Mr. Asbell,” explaining this was not how his client saw his political career coming to an end.

The 76-year old former mayor was asked by the judge, “Are you guilty?”

He responded, “As charged, sir.”

The plea deal allows Asbell to make restitution for \$37,307.69, which is only what could be definitively proven, according to Charles Spahos, attorney for the state.

Peele explained town lead-

ers had agreed this amount seemed “very minimal for what has happened.”

“We recognize full well this is not going to repair the damages done,” Peele said.

Judge Blount agreed.

“I told the lawyers I was not comfortable with this,” he stated.

Blount told Mayor Peele, “I normally don’t say a lot in court.” He continued, “The victims and how they feel is important to me.”

Peele nodded to the judge. “We want some finality,” he stated. “It’s been 30 months now.”

A check was turned over to the state’s attorney from Asbell Monday in order to begin repayment. The check was then handed over to town officials.

Asbell will be expected to make payment on the debt each month. Failure to do so will be seen as a probation violation.

Monday’s court case completed two-plus years of turbulent times in Powellsville, which began on Aug. 2, 2016.

During a meeting of the Powellsville Commissioners, it was made clear the town was under investigation by the State Bureau of Investigation.

The board actions during the meeting revealed the investigation was linked to then-Mayor Thomas Asbell.

Among the resolutions passed during the August 2, 2016 meeting were:

1. Mayor Thomas Asbell was prohibited from enter-

ing the town hall, unless escorted by law enforcement.

2. Asbell’s salaries as Water Manager and Maintenance Manager were terminated as of the meeting date.

3. Cell phone owned by the town of Powellsville and used by Asbell was to be surrendered to the town commissioners immediately.

4. Locks on the office and conference room were changed and Asbell was directed to surrender all keys belonging to the town immediately.

5. Asbell was suspended from his role as Powellsville Finance Officer.

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Windsor

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sion, the board agreed to meet at 6:30 p.m. Thursday, April 25 to allow citizens to speak with the board.

The mayor said people on both sides of the issue would be allowed to speak as the board hears from its citizens.

The meeting is set to take place in the Robert B. Spivey Meeting Room at the Windsor Town Hall.

In addition to hearing from citizens, the board will also revisit their earlier decision to eliminate One-Stop Voting for upcoming municipal elections.

Windsor Town Administra-

tor Allen Castelloe said he had received new information since the board voted unanimously to end One-Stop voting. He said that vote effectively eliminated all voting for town offices except those cast on Election Day.

He said the Bertie County Board of Elections said the town could not have absentee ballots of any kind if commissioners upheld their decision to eliminate One-Stop voting.

Mayor Pro-Tempore Cathy Wilson said the board would have to revisit the decision if that were the case because it was not right to eliminate absentee ballots.

“It is critical to have absentee ballots,” she said before making a motion to overturn the board’s earlier vote.

Commissioner Randy K. Whitaker amended the motion to reverse the earlier decision completely.

Commissioner Randy Walston said he agreed with his fellow board members calling the elimination of absentee ballots “a game changer.”

He said he wanted to know if the decision rendered by the Bertie County Board of Elections was a local decision, or made according to state law.

He also asked if other municipalities in Bertie County,

none of which utilize One-Stop voting, were also barred from having absentee balloting.

Castelloe said he did not know which body made the decision about absentee ballots, but would find out. He said he did not believe other towns offered absentee ballots.

The board agreed by consensus to allow Castelloe to find out the answer to questions posed by Walston before proceeding with a vote.

Procedurally, the board decided to let both Wilson’s motion and Whitaker’s amendment die due to lack of a second so they could address the matter April 25.

The board also delayed a decision on a request from Ryan and Samantha Ellis to remove a dilapidated structure at 704 North King St.

The board is investigating the most economical way to help with the request, and will take it back up during its May meeting.

In other business, the board:

* approved a bid by Tripp Brothers to pave streets in Windsor; and

* discussed stop signs and parking on Hoffer Avenue.

Thadd White can be reached via email at twhite@ncweeklies.com.

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