

911 calls

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assistance in 2002 is high because, in his opinion, the overall crime rate "has increased." However, calls to report sexual offenses such as rape appear to have significantly dropped by approximately 15 percent; child abuse calls have slightly declined, and reports of domestic disturbances are decreasing in 2002, according to records.

Already, he says, 911 has received 25,653 requests through September 23 for assistance from the Sheriff's Office, he said. That compares to 27,244 in all of last year.

"That figure for last year does not even include the volume of calls for medical or fire emergencies," Fairbanks said. Calls answered in 2001 amounted to 836,910, including 911, administrative and criminal information data, he said, with an average of 1.6 new transactions per minute.

911 employs two full time telecommunicators on shift at all times. Plus, a few part-timers fill in for them in case of absence, he said. Al Schwarebier serves in a dual role as the department head of 911 and Hoke fire marshal. Fairbanks supervises the telecommunicators and is available as a back-up telecommunicator.

Response

"The call volume has increased for the Sheriff's Office and that definitely puts a higher demand upon the telecommunicators," Fairbanks said. "Sheriff Jim Davis' staff is fairly new. He is practically changing staff all the time. We have to assist them frequently with finding the location of where emergency calls originated.

"The deputies are not real familiar with the county."

Fairbanks said his department is meeting the demand for service. However, he admitted at rare times the 911 lines have been "jammed up."

Crime complaints up

Based on 911 statistics available from 2001 through September 23 2002, requests to assist with property crimes have already risen. With three months remaining this year, 2002 statistics of 1,302 requests reflect 50 more calls have already been received, exceeding last year's total of 1,252 calls. 911 is averaging 144.4 calls per month in 2002 in contrast to 104.3 calls per month in 2001 for reported or suspicion of property crimes.

These emergency request aver-

ages are based upon combined statistics of breaking and entering, attempted B&E, B&E larceny, B&E of automobiles, larceny, automobile theft and larceny of gas incidents. General larceny crime calls, alone, have escalated from 255 last year to 501 in the first nine months of this year.

According to Major Thomas Carlton of the Sheriff's Office, only one homicide has been reported this year, comparing to three murders in 2001. However, the number of violent crime calls for incidents such as shootings, stabbings and assaults appears to already be higher in 2002, according to Fairbanks.

There were 198 assaults called in to 911 telecommunicators during 2001, comparing to 176 calls already recorded in 2002. That averages to 19.5 assaults per month this year compared to 16.5 last year.

In 2001, 10 reports of stabbings were called in to 911. The 2002 record has already exceeded last year, totaling 11 cases. This averages to a ratio of 1.2 incidents per month so far in 2002, comparing to the lower rate of .8 per month last year.

Shootings or shots fired into dwellings and vehicles is up to 29 calls this year, comparing to 28 calls for all of 2001. Averaging 3.2 calls per month in 2002, last year's record was lower at only 2.3 calls per month.

In 2001, there were 31 complaint calls received for armed robbery, strong-armed and other robberies. Those statistics have already increased this year with a total of 30 calls reported. Averaging a higher rate of 4 robbery calls per month this year, only 3.2 per month were called in during 2001.

If the trend in domestic assault calls continues, an increase close to 30 percent is anticipated this year. In 2001, records reflected 188 domestic assault calls for assistance, comparing to 188 already received in 2002.

Downward trend

Calls for assistance with domestic disturbances appear to be showing a decrease in frequency for 911. In 2001, there were 500 domestic emergencies requiring assistance from the Sheriff's Office. In 2002, 357 domestic incidents have been reported. This shows a slight decrease from 41.6 per month in 2001 to 39.6 so far in 2002.

Reports of child abuse appear to be slightly declining in 911 calls. Records reflected 24 reported incidents of child abuse last year, averaging two cases per month. It contrasted to 14 cases received this year, averaging 1.5 per month.

Reports of missing persons continues to be significantly high, but is slightly declining so far this year. In 2001, 205 people were reported missing, requiring deputies to be dispatched. This compared to 139 people reported lost in 2002. There were five searches conducted by deputies last year for missing people and two launched this year.

"The first calls that are transmitted to 911 from citizens may be called in as one type of complaint, but could be changed into another category upon the deputies' arrivals," Fairbanks said. "For example, an assault might be upgraded to a murder, or a breaking and entering might turn out to be a false report.

Bond claim

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of embezzlement and 64 counts of forgery, concerning 76 checks allegedly written to herself drawn from county funds. The highest check amount allegedly written by her totaled \$25,000.

At the time the alleged criminal misconduct occurred, McPhatter was distinguished as the only black, female county manager in the state, according to a county official. McPhatter was earning more than \$80,000 per year in October 2001 when she resigned after being suspected of embezzlement allegations.

Rush was indicted on one felony count of "accessory after the fact."

Even with the administrative action taken to retrieve the bond refunds, Human Resources Director Jean Wade said it has yet to be determined if all the losses will be covered. If necessary, the county may have to deal with litigation to state its position, she added.

"I do feel like we will recoup most of our losses through our various insurance coverages," Wade said. "We still do not know if the bond covered losses per occurrence or if it was an annual per year amount that was covered."

"Our County Attorney Neil Yarborough was very instrumental in compiling all the data that was necessary for the bond company. The county commissioners requested him to put together the information."

According to Wade, the bond firm has had "ample" time to respond to the county's request. She will send a follow-up letter if she is requested to do so by the board or county manager, she said.

Wade said other liability insurance through the Risk Management Pools administered by the N.C. County Commissioners Association could cover "deficiencies" not paid by the bond firm.

Losses

A pattern of embezzlement began, according to recent audit records, in July 1994 when McPhatter was assistant finance director. However, suspicion of possible prolonged embezzlement was not uncovered until a county employee discovered a check in October 2001.

The first alleged incident - check on July 19, 1994 - was for \$1,950, but it was unknown what amount of bond would have covered it. McPhatter was promoted to finance director in 1996. During 1996 and 1997 when her bond was \$20,000, the moneys allegedly embezzled totaled over \$29,000.

In 1997 and 1998, McPhatter still served as finance director, but was promoted in a dual capacity as interim county manager. The bond amounts indicated she was covered "\$20,000 plus \$20,000" for the two positions. Wade said some question apparently remains if her status as "interim" was covered by the bond. Losses to the county exceeded \$47,000 during that period, according to records.

In December 1998, McPhatter was promoted to county manager, but also still served as finance director until June 30, 2000. Her bond amounts still totaled \$20,000 plus \$20,000, but the

alleged thefts of money exceeded \$136,000 during that one-and-a-half year span.

After stepping down as finance director in July 2000, McPhatter was only bonded for \$20,000. However, the losses to Hoke from her alleged embezzlement was over \$30,000 until it apparently ended in November 2000.

Over the course of her tenure, McPhatter also allegedly spent more than \$23,000 of county funds in unauthorized travel stipends, records showed.

Rush, who was promoted from assistant finance director to finance director in July 2000, had a bond placed on her of \$20,000. Rush allegedly accepted a personal check from McPhatter and deposited it to cover a \$5,000 check McPhatter had allegedly already forged from county funds on November 7, 2000.

"Assuming the county manager would have little contact with the county's money when Shirley Rush took over as finance director, Mrs.

McPhatter's coverage remained \$20,000," Wade said. "In August 31, 2001, we increased the coverage for finance officer to \$100,000, but the (alleged) embezzlements of Mrs. McPhatter occurred before that time."

In improving liability coverages, Wade said a \$100,000 bond has been placed on assistant finance director Scott Edwards since he is serving in the role, unofficially, as finance director.

Other bond coverages on county employees include: \$400,000 on Tax Collector Judy Pittman; \$25,000 on County Manager Mike Wood; \$25,000 on Sheriff Jim Davis; \$25,000 on Coroner Frank Crumpler; and \$25,000 on Register of Deeds Della Maynor-Bowen.

Yarborough said the schedule of bonds for McPhatter and the schedule of the county's losses that were applicable have been processed.

"I am not sure how much the reimbursement will be," Yarborough said. "I feel very confident that we will

receive some reimbursement on the bond claim that was filed."

Spanco building

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Marine occupied the property for a period of time and left owing \$22,500. Fields said Penn Yan, which moved to Virginia, has signed a promissory note with the city and will be paying their debt.

Penn Yan's plans sank when \$100,000 in critical funding from the state did not come through; that also resulted in a delay in the release of \$55,000 in financial commitment expected from Hoke County.

"Once the sale is complete, the city will clear approximately \$115,000 on the purchase taking into account the deal with Penn Yan," Fields said. At the time the city accepted the Spanco building, the city paid approximately \$111,000 in back taxes to the county.

"Paraclete is anxious to begin operations immediately," Fields said.

The company's owner, Tim D'Annunzio, is a resident of Raeford.

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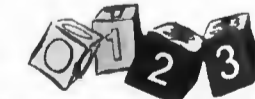
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