

# Women can handle job with quick dispatch

By BILL COUTANT  
STAFF WRITER

**F**armington Hills police Chief Bill Dwyer calls dispatching the toughest job in the department.

That may be why, despite dramatic advances in high-tech communications equipment, it takes a certain kind of individual to work as a police and fire dispatcher.

"It takes someone who can do several tasks at the same time," said Sgt. Joe Rebh, supervisor of dispatching for the Farmington Hills police. "A dispatcher may be typing something into the LEIN (law enforcement information network), answering a non-emergency call and get a 9-1-1 call."

He should know. When Rebh first joined the department as a 17-year-old cadet 26 years ago, dispatching was his job. He's worked in the patrol, undercover and traffic divisions, but has put his own mark on the communications room, which he designed. He's rightly proud of his department of 19, because they are the people the public is most likely to come in contact with.

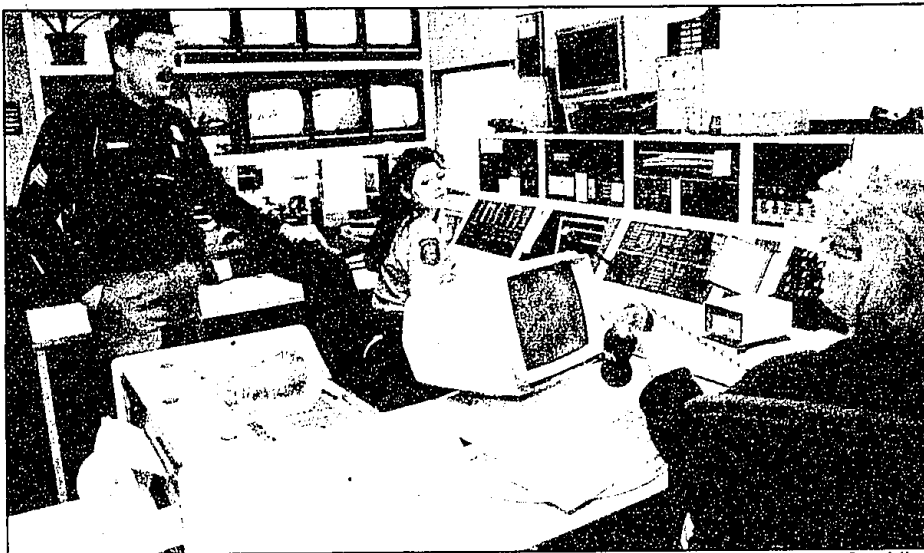
The department, which also dispatches for Franklin and Bingham Farms as well as the Hills fire department, receives more than 300 non-emergency calls and from 45-50 emergency calls in a given 24-hour period.

"We always try and hire dispatchers with experience," Rebh said.

"Every day is different," said veteran dispatcher Marylou Alex, who has worked dispatch continuously since 1981. "A lot of times people call with things that they think are an emergency, but aren't. And there are plenty of funny calls, like the snake (boa constrictor) in someone's trunk."

But most calls are not that amusing, and some can be downright rude.

"We've had people call us names, swear and hang up," said dispatcher Kim Alvarado, adding that recent calls about a suicide and a baby who died of sudden infant death syndrome are examples of difficult situations. "But I think it's the kind of job where you know you are helping people."



**Taking calls:**  
Sgt. Joe Rebh helps out dispatcher Marylou Alex (right) by answering a question from a caller in the Farmington Hills Police communications center.

STAFF PHOTOS BY SHARON LEIMULE

Hearing a replay of a 9-1-1 call might lead you to believe that the dispatcher is too calm. But with the enhanced 9-1-1 system in Farmington Hills, the dispatcher can see the address of the telephone, whether it's a residence, business or school. While the dispatcher is trying to determine the type of response needed, he or she can be simultaneously sending police, an ambulance or fire vehicles to the scene.

And the advanced dispatch system can put a map in front of the dispatcher to help give directions to those going to the scene along with other information, even including some basic life-saving procedure.

"But we're not medical experts," Alex said. "Some people think they're talking to a doctor, and they aren't."

Although things can get

busier during the afternoon rush hour, with more traffic accidents and activity, there is no real slow time for dispatch, Rebh said. And after about six months, many dispatchers can feel less than loved.

"You've got to realize that no one is happy to talk to you," Rebh said. "The person calling in an emergency or complaint is mad or worried, the officer is not always happy to go where you're sending him. So you have to get used to it."

"You have to remember, everything we do is recorded," he said. "If we make a mistake, it's there."

Rebh has also found that women tend to handle the job of dispatching better than men do.

"Women seem to handle multiple tasks better than men do," he said. "And believe me, I've tried to hire men who can do this."



**Let's communicate:**  
Dispatcher Kim Alvarado speaks with an police officer.

## Former NBA star courts kids with anti-drug drive

By LARRY O'CONNOR  
STAFF WRITER

In his anti-drug drive, former NBA star Spencer Haywood penetrated typical teenagers' notions of invincibility and slammed home his message.

Points scored weren't found on a board. Those were registered on the faces of North Farmington High students Wednesday who listened to Haywood's story.

Haywood's presentation is part of the Farmington Public Schools Student Assistance Program. Farmington Hills-based Alexander Hamilton Insurance Co. sponsored Haywood's appearance.

Haywood, whose NBA career was marked with equal amounts of brilliance and controversy, let kids know the ball was in their court when it comes to using drugs and alcohol.

"You have choices; you make the choices," Haywood said. "You can make all the right decisions. You can make the wrong decisions."

Haywood told the audience about some of the wrong ones he's made.

The 6-foot-8 speaker starred at the University of Detroit in the late 1980s. He became the first collegiate player to leave school early and enter the NBA draft as a hardship case, paving the way for Magic Johnson, Isaiah Thomas and Chris Webber to do the same.

He was fierce rebounder and a prolific scorer in the pros, averaging 25 points a game.

After playing for the Seattle SuperSonics, Haywood went to the New York Knicks. In the Big Apple, the seeds of drug abuse were planted when he first tried marijuana.

"That drug," he said, "opened a gateway."

The path smoking marijuana open eventually led to a downward spiral of snorting and free-basing cocaine and drinking. He estimates drug abuse cost him \$12 million, and many of the lives of those around him at the time.

When he was traded to Los Angeles, the Lakers were gunning for the NBA title with a phenom named Magic Johnson. Haywood's game dropped off as cocaine consumed his life. Soon, he was only averaging 5 points a contest. He started to blame the coach for not playing him enough.

At one point, Haywood couldn't even hold onto a pass. He put stick-um on his hands. When Kareem Abdul-Jabbar went to put up one of his patented sky hooks, the ball stuck in his palm.

"The referee said, 'Who is using the stick-um?'" I was standing next to Julius Erving and because I had become such a horrible liar I said, 'Julius Erving, he's using the stick-um.' Meanwhile it was running down the front of my uniform."

The story was not about gamesmanship, but underscored the denial. Haywood turned to his audience.

"You all know about denial, don't you?"

Haywood asked the ninth-, 10th- and 11th-graders about some of the choices they're making: the clothes they're wearing, the music they're listening to and the people they emulate.

He told them they'll be facing even more difficult choices. He didn't lecture. He listened to their questions, ranging from whether it was true that he punched a referee during a game in college (it was) to how does he talk to his children about drugs and alcohol.

"He had an interesting story to share," said sophomore Shannon McCoy. "It helped me out a lot. I never do that stuff anyway. I think it (Haywood's appearance) would help a lot of people here, though."

Added junior Russell Hayes, "I thought he was pretty convincing. He showed a lot of emotion."

"There's a lot of people that drink here. I don't think they'll stop. They're mostly seniors, and they weren't here anyway."

Haywood speaks to many teenagers. He also raises money to send underprivileged children to college. He relates to teens by taking a direct route.

Said Haywood: "We could have talked all afternoon."

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### ON THE AGENDA

Below are highlights from the agendas of meetings this week. All meetings are open to the public.

**Farmington Hills City Council**  
City Hall, 474-4111  
7:00 p.m. Monday, April 25

**Agenda items include:**

■ Consideration of a special assessment district for road im-

provements for Linden Avenue and notice of intent to issue bonds, and declaration of intent to reimburse project expenditures with bond proceeds.

■ Consideration of enactment of a rezoning request for property on the east side of Haggerty Road, north of Hills Tech Drive from one-family residential to industrial research office.

■ Consideration of a resolution regarding State Revenue Sharing.

■ Consideration of a request to organize a Grand River corridor and adjoining neighborhoods study effort.

■ Transmittal of capital improvement program for 1994-95 through 1999-2000.

■ Consideration of approval of the Mercy site plan.