

New system helps fight crime; System making county safer

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For many people, state-of-the-art electronics is a virtual door that opens to a world of information, fun and easier work flow; for many others it's a baffling world they'd rather avoid. But everyone can agree that the role it plays in making the world safer is worthwhile.

For instance, Hendry County law enforcement - both the sheriff's office and Clewiston Police Department - is taking advantage of electronic advancements to put them one step ahead in the struggle to make residents safer. As the nerve center of any law enforcement agency, Communications Centers (dispatch) are the intake point of vital information from residents in trouble and relay that information to the officers sent to assist. HCSO and CPD dispatch centers now feature some of the most advanced communications equipment at any law enforcement agency. For several years Caller ID provided the dispatcher with the name and address of a 911 caller. Now Positron's VIPER (Voice-Over-IP for Emergency Response) and Power 911 Mapping have taken that capability even further. Hendry County is only the second in Florida to get the VIPER system

The Power MAP can allow the dispatcher to pinpoint a cell phone caller (with GPS capability) to within one foot of his position. Older cell phones do not have this capability. The advantage is obvious. Someone calling 911 on a cell phone can be located immediately on the VIPER computer screen so the dispatcher can send help exactly where it's needed.

The map can also show the dispatcher an aerial view of an entire city, all the way down to a specific house, including outbuildings and trees. The dispatcher can then advise an officer of possible hiding places, providing additional security for an officer searching for a suspect at night.

CPD was the first agency in Hendry County to acquire the VIPER and Power MAP. Installation began last September and all testing has been completed.

The cost was just over \$128,000; funding was from the State Wireless Board. A back up unit is located in a secure building so that if CPD has to evacuate (think back to Hurricane Wilma), 911 calls may still be received. It was paid for with \$48,000 in grant monies. All equipment handling the taking of a 911 call has also been updated.

911 calls coming through from the hearing impaired or mute come through on the system like an e-mail and the dispatcher can type in a response.

In the Communications Center, the dispatcher now monitors four computer screens - two VIPER screens, one pc and one CAD screen, which shows which officers, firefighters and EMS personnel are on duty and their status. They can also link with other agencies.

The system can show previous traffic stops for a vehicle, indicate previous field interviews of specific individuals and BOLOs, and can track any incident from the original call to the jail.

The new system can also cut the time required to get a search warrant by pinpointing a lot or parcel and identifying its owner.

The county's new aerial map photos were taken in January, showing the most up-to-date information possible - all entrances/exits, trees, outbuildings at any address and even the best routes of travel for law enforcement, fire and EMS.

Using VIPER, the dispatcher will actually be able to see more than the officer on scene because he will have an overview of the situation - a distinct advantage, especially in the dark.

E911 Coordinator Robin McLean has been working toward this day for three years, updating addresses and street names throughout the county. House numbers and street names are matched with the Embarq (formerly Sprint) database.

The technology will continue to get better. Robin and CPD Dispatcher Harry Spears attended a conference in Orlando in February on Next Generation 911 (NG911). When that technology is out, it will allow dispatchers to receive real time video of a crime in progress or a picture of a license plate transmitted by a witness.

Harry Spears has been at CDP since August of 2005. He is retired from 20 years in military communications. As a professional in emergency communications, he has some serious advice for the average person. "Make sure your cell phone has a locator chip - you will need it in a medical emergency," he said, adding, "And don't forget about the kids." Unfortunately, children have become prime targets for some criminals. He also advises that people shouldn't be afraid to call 911 in an emergency.

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