

December 1st 2023

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# NEWSLETTER



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A publication of the Virginia Chapter of the Association of Public Safety Communications Officials



## SAVE THE DATE: UPCOMING EVENTS



January 16th 2024- 9-1-1 Goes to Richmond

February 6th 2024- Pre-Summit Committee Workshop- Chesterfield, Virginia

February 7th 2024- Winter Summit- Chesterfield, Virginia

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# MEET THE BOARD

Your 2023-2024 Virginia APCO Board:

**President:**

Denice Crowder  
Director of Emergency Communications  
Dinwiddie County Division of Fire & EMS

**President Elect:**

Kriste Farley, RPL  
Communications Supervisor  
Orange County Emergency Communications

**Vice-President:**

Tom Nolan  
Director of Public Safety Communications, Powhatan County

**Secretary:**

Rae Fleming  
Interim Deputy Director  
York-Poquoson-Williamsburg Emergency Communications

**Treasurer:**

Lily Gregg  
Deputy Director - Information Technology  
Charlottesville-UVA-Albemarle Emergency Communications

**Director-At-Large:**

Joell Kight, CPE  
Communications Manager  
Office of the Sheriff, Fauquier County, VA

**Director-At-Large:**

Melissa Foster, ENP  
Director  
Emergency Communications, City of Lynchburg, VA

**Director-At-Large:**

Christine Giglio, ENP, RPL  
CAD Administrator, Interim Director  
Bedford County Emergency Communications Center

**Director-At-Large:**

Jada Lee  
Director Emergency Communications & Citizen Services  
City of Virginia Beach, VA

**APCO International Executive Council Delegate:**

Jo Anne Munroe  
Retired Director

**Immediate Past President:**

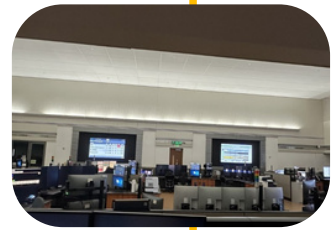
Sonny Saxton, EMT-P, ENP  
Executive Director, Charlottesville-UVA-Albemarle Emergency Communications





# CENTER SPOTLIGHT:

The Chesapeake Police Department Public Safety Emergency Communications (PSEC) Unit is a dedicated group of telecommunicators who provide exceptional service to the 250,000 permanent residents of Chesapeake as well as countless commuters and visitors. The Chesapeake PSEC is a consolidated PSAP and provides 911 services and dispatches for Police, Animal Services, Fire and EMS. In 2022 the PSEC Unit received a combined total of 311,840 calls for 9-1-1 and the 10-digit non-emergency lines. Chesapeake is unique in that we are part of the Hampton Roads region which has 7 cities and a total population of well over a million people. The Hampton Roads area also has multiple military bases and we partner with them to handle situations on and off the base. The 911 center has multiple connectivity points to be able to communicate quickly and effectively with all of the neighboring agencies to include into North Carolina, making the PSEC a leader in interoperability. The Chesapeake PSEC Unit has one of the region's only Tactical Dispatch Teams that responds to the field in the event they are needed. The Tactical Dispatch Team is a selection of highly trained telecommunicators who respond out as part of the CPD SWAT team during an activation. The Chesapeake PSEC had the distinction of being the first PSAP in the Hampton Roads area to have the implementation of NextGen911 which was completed in May 2022. In December 2022, the Chesapeake PSEC Unit was one of the first volunteer agencies to go into partnership with the national mental health crisis hotline, 988. The PSEC Unit is housed in a new building that opened in 2018. The facility is state of the art, and contains multiple other city departments and offices. This facility has brought attention from leaders across The Commonwealth for inspiration for upgrading their own public safety centers. The PSEC Unit is the nerve center of the City of Chesapeake and keeps the city running 24/7. The Chesapeake PSEC truly does employ "the first, first responders."



# TEAMMATES IN ACTION:



Communications Officer, Niasia Scarborough, was recently recognized by her agency for her outstanding contributions as a Certified Training Officer. During the agency's last hiring cycle, Niasia went above and beyond in her training duties. Niasia was observed on several occasions designing testing mechanisms, providing detailed explanations of procedures, and thoroughly documenting her trainees progress. The agency recently began using the Frontline application for training and Niasia embraced the new technology, using it to her benefit as a training officer. Niasia often requests additional resources, such as QA/QI forms and CAD data lists, from her supervisors to aid in her training duties. When faced with challenges, Niasia makes the time to speak with the agency training coordinator to ask for guidance. Niasia truly cares about the success of her trainees and is willing to do whatever is necessary, even if it means re-assigning the trainee to another trainer, if it is in their best interest.

Niasia was recognized by her supervisors for her efforts and was awarded the agency's Bi-Monthly Communications Officer Award for September/October.



-Eastern Shore of Virginia 9-1-1 Communications

# CONFERENCE RECAP:

The 2023 Fall APCO/NENA/Interoperability Conference took place October 23rd through October 27th in beautiful Roanoke, Virginia. There were 557 registrations for the event with 539 in attendance, making it the biggest conference in Virginia APCO history!

The conference offered two pre-conference classes: Zero to Com-L and How Mismanaged Conflict Affects Retention. The Crystal Ballroom was packed during the opening session of the conference where we heard from members of the Virginia APCO Board, the Virginia NENA board, the Virginia Statewide Interoperability Coordinator, the Virginia Information Technology Agency Communications Coordinator, the Virginia Department of Emergency Management State Coordinator, Virginia Delegate Sam Rasoul, and Virginia Delegate Mike Cherry. Virginia Delegate Mike Cherry was presented with an award from Virginia APCO for his commitment and dedication through his advocacy for 9-1-1.

Following Wednesday's opening session, a crowd gathered near the vendor hall for the official dedication and ribbon cutting of the the Joe Gately Exhibitor Hall. Mr. Gately's wife, son, and business partner/friend were in attendance for the dedication. A poster board donning handwritten, heartfelt messages in memory of Joe Gately was present near the display. There were 49 different vendors in attendance, prompting plans to extend our vendor hall for the next conference.

The conference offered four learning tracks: Frontline Telecommunicator, Supervisor & Management Development, Technologies and Applications, and Interoperability. There were 56 different speakers and 43 different classes offered throughout the duration of the conference. There was an abundance of experience and knowledge to be absorbed in each of the classes presented. Our entertainment nights offered an opportunity to let loose and enjoy the good times! Wednesday night we hosted a costume contest, with a DJ, and Thursday night we hosted a Casino Night. Everyone had an exceptional time!

Visit the Virginia APCO Facebook page to see additional photos from the conference.





# GET INVOLVED:



Have you been looking for a way to becoming more involved with Virginia APCO? Have you recently attended a conference and felt the call to do more? Well, look no further! Virginia APCO has several committees that are always eager to bring on new faces and fresh talent! There are many great opportunities available where you can share your talents and help make our Chapter the best it can be.

If you're someone who enjoys planning, networking, and allocating resources, the Conference Committee may be the right fit for you! The Conference Committee is responsible for many tasks, including: securing sponsors and speakers, planning events, working with vendors, and so much more. If you're interested in volunteering for this committee, contact: Joell Kight (joell.kight@fauquiercounty.gov)

If you're someone who enjoys being creative, designing graphics, social media, and networking, the Member Chapter Services Committee may be the place for you! The Membership Committee is responsible for many tasks, including: Totes for Hope, Chapter Newsletters, Teammates In Action, boosting Chapter membership, and so much more. If you're interested in volunteering for this committee, contact: Krista Kilmon (kkilmon@co.northampton.va.us) or Celeste Baldino (csmelser@albemarle.org)

If you're someone who enjoys learning about achievements in 9-1-1 with an objective mindset, the Awards Committee may be someplace to start! The Awards Committee is responsible for reviewing nominations for the Telecommunicator Awards Program and selecting winners for each award category. If you're interested in volunteering for this committee, contact: Jada Lee (jlee@vbgov.com)

If you're someone who enjoys fundraising and helping others, the Sunshine Fund Committee may feed your passions! The Sunshine Fund Committee focuses on raising funds through various fundraising methods that go towards helping our own during their time of need. When requests for funds are received, the committee reviews the request to determine if their needs can be met. If you're interested in volunteering for this committee, contact: Jada Lee (jlee@vbgov.com) or Joanne Munroe (jmunroe@vbgov.com)

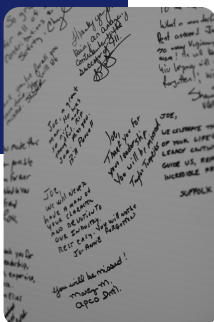
If you're someone who enjoys legislation and debates, and you have a passion for the 9-1-1 Profession, the Legislative Committee may be just the committee for you! This committee teams up with Virginia NENA to monitor legislative and regulatory activities, both state and federal, which impact public safety communications. The committee will provide recommendations to the Chapter on positions supporting or opposing legislation, and will provide information regarding implementation of legislation. The committee may also provide information to legislators and their staff regarding both legislation and public safety communications, and may assist in the drafting of any legislation proposed by the Chapter. If you're interested in volunteering for this committee, contact: Sonny Saxton (ssaxton@albemarle.org)

Other Virginia APCO Committees: Bylaws/Policy, Historical, Training/Scholarships, Nominating, Commercial Advisory, Emerging Leaders and ProCHRT.

## JOE GATELY: A LEGACY



Earlier this year, we lost longtime VA APCO member Joseph Gately. Joe was a subject matter expert, mentor, and friend to many. Joe served in the public safety communications industry for 54 years working for Gately Communications (now MCA) offering his knowledge, advice, and friendship to everyone he met. He served as the Commercial Advisory Council member for the VA APCO Executive Board and was the Sponsorship/Exhibitor Chair for the Fall VA APCO/NENA/SIEC conference committee for over 20 years, where he constantly looked for ways to improve the Fall VA APCO conference by making it a fun, and informational conference for all to enjoy. He was an expert in our industry and mentored many APCO members in his decades of service. It is because of his relationships with vendors and sponsors, that we are able to have a successful VA APCO conference each fall. In memory of Joe, we have named the exhibitor hall the "Joe Gately Exhibitor Hall " in his memory.





# 9-1-1 HOT TOPICS



## The Critical Role of Work-Life Balance in Employee Retention

Staffing shortages have become a hot button topic for 9-1-1 professionals across America. While it is easy to blame some of these staffing issues on the Covid-19 pandemic, the truth is that staffing shortages have been an issue in 9-1-1 for many years. The 9-1-1 profession has always involuntarily lent itself to being a stepping stone to other public safety careers, which in turn yields high turnover rates for most agencies. With that said, we are now facing an evolution in our workforce that has brought about new workplace expectations that many in the 9-1-1 profession are struggling to account for. Employee expectations related to mental health, autonomy, and flexibility highlight the importance of work-life balance to the new generation of employees.

In the battle for adequate staffing, employee mental health has taken the center stage. As employees become more self-aware of their mental health struggles, we are seeing employees begin to prioritize their mental health over the job. This often leads to increased sick leave and, in some cases, separation from the job all together. Increased sick leave and unexpected separations put an increased strain on the staff that remain, which only exacerbates the mental health issues of others in the PSAP. It is a vicious cycle that seems impossible to control.

Some agencies have deployed comprehensive mental health programs in an attempt to be proactive. These programs can include access to mental health services, visits from service animals, specified mental health leave, and/or development of peer support teams. These types of programs ensure that staff have access to much needed mental health services and help reduce the stigma surrounding mental health related issues. Other agencies have focused on increasing employee resiliency by increasing training efforts related to mental health and instituting quarterly mental health check-ins with staff. These efforts are bringing increased awareness and show employees that their agency and management also prioritize their mental health.

Autonomy is a new development in the 9-1-1 profession that seems to be stemming from the newer generation of employees entering the workforce who are used to working independently, with little oversight. When they enter the 9-1-1 profession, they are often being met with high demands and constant oversight in the form of micro-managers. Due to the complexity of the 9-1-1 profession and the high degree of liability associated with it, it can be difficult to pull back from the micro-management mentality for some leaders. This results in employees feeling like they are not trusted and stifled in the workplace, creating increased and unnecessary workplace pressure.

While micro-management may be a necessity of the job to protect the agency and its staff from liability, there are ways to achieve this without making employees feel untrusted or stifled in their positions. Employees need to feel that their input is valued by their employer. Creating opportunities where employees can be involved in decisions related to their job, such as policy development and new technology, lets them know their creative visions are valued. Employers can also take a vested interest in helping their employees achieve their personal goals for professional growth. The 9-1-1 profession needs employees that want to grow; therefore, we should be motivated to invest in their success to the best of our abilities.

Flexibility in the workplace is an idea that many 9-1-1 agencies struggle with, particularly when it comes to the schedule. Many agencies struggle with the loss of staff due to the demands of the schedule, while others struggle with the expectations of tenured staff versus new staff.



# 9-1-1 HOT TOPICS



There is often a mentality that manifests where tenured employees expect to be given the more desirable shifts, simply because they have been there longer. This mentality often leads to a toxic workplace culture where new employees feel like their contributions have no value and friction develops between new and tenured employees.

Some agencies have found success by shifting their posture away from scheduling that is solely based on tenure, without any flexibility. Tenure does not equate good work ethic, nor should it be the only status that dictates the shift someone is assigned to. New employees expect a high degree of equality and fairness in the workplace. They expect opportunities to earn their place, in an equal manner, just like everyone else. Some agencies employee rotating schedules where all staff work all shifts, while others have instituted points systems that reward positive work ethic as a means for shift bidding. Other agencies make changes to their shifts and schedules to help accommodate the needs of their staff, showing employees that there is flexibility to meet their work-life balance needs.

Work-life balance is a complex issue that requires managers to think outside of a box that many have grown accustomed to living within. Addressing these issues requires progressive thinking and an acceptance of change in the workplace. To overcome the great staffing crisis, it is imperative that managers in the 9-1-1 profession critically evaluate the needs of their staff, address the hard questions, and find creative ways to create work-life balance for their employees. While the same issues exist in most every agency, the solutions will vastly differ based on their individual hurdles. Even still, the first key to solving any employee retention problem rests solely with the willingness to explore a new path, even if it may be difficult or unpopular.

Krista Kilmon- Deputy 9-1-1 Director- Eastern Shore of Virginia 9-1-1 Communications



## FINAL THOUGHTS

**Teammates in Action:** Do you have a teammate that you'd like to recognize? Visit the Virginia APCO website and submit a nomination form from the "Awards & Recognition" tab. Nominations should be e-mailed to Celeste Baldino at [csmelser@albemarle.org](mailto:csmelser@albemarle.org).

**Center Spotlight:** Is your center doing awesome things? Have you recently made changes that you want to share? Reach out to Krista Kilmon at [kkilmon@co.northampton.va.us](mailto:kkilmon@co.northampton.va.us) to submit you center for the Center Spotlight in our next issue!

**9-1-1 Hot Topics:** We'd love to have you as a guest columnist! If you have a topic that you'd like to write an article about, we encourage you to do so and share it with us! E-mail Krista Kilmon or Celeste Baldino with your ideas!

**HAPPY  
HOLIDAYS**

FROM THE VIRGINIA APCO TEAM!