



# NEWS



## News Headlines 4/19/2018

- Calm Voices amid chaos: Southern California emergency dispatchers honored for their crucial public safety roles

## Calm Voices amid chaos: Southern California emergency dispatchers honored for their crucial public safety roles

Alejandra Molina, The Press-Enterprise

Posted: April 13, 2018, 2:46 p.m.



CONFIRE Dispatcher, Dominique Mack takes emergency 911 calls at the dispatch center in Rialto, Thursday, April 12, 2018. (Eric Reed/For The Sun/SCNG)

About eight years ago, emergency dispatcher Dominique Mack took a call from a woman who found herself stuck on a road in Lytle Creek in the San Gabriel Mountains.

Heavy rain was falling, fog had begun encroaching and the woman's car was in an area known to flood during storms. But she sounded calm, and Mack took down her location to dispatch emergency crews.

Suddenly, the call dropped. The woman called back. Water was rising in her car. Her tone changed.

"She was saying her goodbyes to her family," said Mack, a dispatcher with CONFIRE, San Bernardino County's emergency dispatch center, which gets an average of 600 calls per day.

Mack and her co-workers waited past the end of their shift to find out her status. Emergency crews eventually found and rescued her after a number of dispatchers fielded her calls.

"It was amazing to see the teamwork that was involved with that call," said Mack, 47.

As a dispatcher, Mack handles calls like that one every day. While the details of each person's predicament vary widely, nearly every one involves a sense of urgency and demands a swift response.

This week, dispatchers have been recognized as part of a national campaign honoring their work. Officially known as National Public Safety Telecommunicators Week, the event was created nearly 40 years ago by Patricia Anderson of the Contra Costa County Sheriff's Office. Congress in 1994 recognized the event that is celebrated during the second week of April.

Los Angeles Police Chief Charlie Beck at a gathering with dispatchers Wednesday said emergency responders are those who are "always heard, never seen."

San Bernardino County Sheriff John McMahon manned the dispatch lines Wednesday, describing dispatchers as "the lifeline between the men and women of this department."

Mike Bello, director of CONFIRE, commended dispatchers for their ability to keep calm when dealing with panicked callers.

"They have to truly care about people," Bello said.

Dispatchers respond to radio and emergency systems, dispatch emergency crews, and keep track of complaints, incidents, and emergency personnel on scene. California is home to an estimated 6,600 police, fire, and ambulance dispatchers, according to 2017 data compiled by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Many work 12-hour shifts, three days a week.

Tricia Dinkle, 40, has been a dispatcher with the Glendora Police Department for nearly 20 years. She was studying to become a preschool teacher, but in 1999 she saw an ad looking for a dispatcher. It sounded exciting, she said. She applied and she's been doing it ever since.

Dinkle begins her day at 5 a.m. and leaves about 5:30 p.m. She deals with a range of calls from a person reporting theft after leaving a car unlocked to a witness reporting domestic violence.

"No day is busier than the other," she said.

One call stands out, though.

She and her partner received a call from a mother whose ex-husband was despondent when he was with her children. He wound up dropping off two of the children in Glendora. One child remained with him, while he threatened to kill his son and himself with a gun.

Dinkle and her partner quickly located the man in Ontario by tracking a cellphone ping from his phone. They nailed down his car and location and police arrested him soon after. An Amber alert wasn't necessary.

"That was something that could have ended tragically," Dinkle said.

For Kristen Jauregui, 37, becoming a dispatcher allowed her to have a more nuanced view of life. She started her dispatching career when she was just 18 years old.

"I grew up pretty sheltered," said Jauregui, who is a dispatcher for the El Monte Police Department. "I didn't really understand the ways of the world."

"I just really liked the fact that I was there to help people and try to calm them down," Jauregui added. Since last March, El Monte police dispatchers have answered more than an estimated 40,700 calls to 911.

Early in her career, she took a call dealing with a homicide. A young girl, who was about 6 years old, witnessed her mother being killed by her father, she said. The mother had a restraining order on him, but allowed him to go in the house, she said.

Other family members were there, but it was the young girl who gave the most clear description of her father, Jauregui said.

"She was completely calm even though she saw the tragedy," she said.

This was toward the end of her shift. She went home, and later learned police had arrested him.

Jauregui said she's proud of the work they do, "knowing that we're helping those that really want help."

“We’re helping at least put some closure to their day, if we are able to catch the person who damaged their property or hurt their family member,” she said.

<https://www.dailynews.com/2018/04/13/calm-voices-amid-chaos-southern-california-emergency-dispatchers-honored-for-their-crucial-public-safety-roles/>