

# Emergency Dispatch





*Patrolmen Bob Chase and Francis "Bronco" Byrne  
on duty at the police/fire station in 1956*



# Cuyahoga Heights 2018 Centennial

AUGUST - 1960			
Mon -15	Santini Stawicki -Radio Baur Jr	Wallace -Radio Crooks Chase	Kaminski Boing Feuerstein -Radio
Tue -16	Santini Stawicki -Radio Baur Jr	Wallace Crooks Chase	
Wed -17	Santini Stawicki -Radio Baur Jr	Wallace Baur Jr Chase	
Thu -18	Santini Byrne Baur Jr -Radio	Wallace Chase Stawicki	
Fri -19	Santini Byrne Baur Jr -Radio	Wallace Chase Stawicki	
Sat -20	Gallitz Santini Byrne -Radio	Wallace Chase Stawicki	
Sun -21	Gallitz Santini Byrne -Radio	Wallace Chase Stawicki	
Mon -22	Gallitz Wallace -Radio Baur Jr	Chase Stawicki Feuerstein	
Tue -23	Gallitz Wallace -Radio Baur Jr	Chase Stawicki Feuerstein -Radio	Byrne -Radio Kaminski Boing
Wed -24	Gallitz Santini Baur Jr -Radio	Chase Stawicki Feuerstein -Radio	Byrne -Radio Kaminski
Thu -25	Gallitz Santini Baur Jr -Radio		
Fri -26	Santini Wallace -Radio Baur Jr		
Sat -27	Gallitz Santini Wallace -Radio		
Sun -28	Gallitz Santini Wallace -Radio		

*1960 scheduling log and early dispatch centers*



# *Emergency Dispatch*

by Dispatch Supervisor Barb Cash

Police dispatchers are an integral part of the emergency services department of the Village of Cuyahoga Heights. Dispatchers are ultimately responsible for taking all of the emergency police, fire, and ambulance calls and dispatching the appropriate services to the correct locations. They handle calls for the Village of Cuyahoga Heights, the Village of Valley View, the Village of Brooklyn Heights, and recently the Village of Newburgh Heights, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The Cuyahoga Heights Police Department currently employs six full-time, two permanent part-time, and seven part-time dispatchers. Let's take a look back at the history of dispatch in the Village of Cuyahoga Heights.

## **The Early Years of Police Dispatch**

During the early years of policing, there weren't radios to communicate calls to patrol cars. In most large departments, call boxes were used to relay calls. Police officers would use telephones that were located throughout a jurisdiction to call into the station to check for calls that may have been received.

A unique method was used in the Village of Cuyahoga Heights. Custodians in the village hall used a red light located on a tower at the village hall to alert officers of a call. Once an officer saw the red light, they would stop at the police station to get the location and nature of the call. Over time, the system progressed into the two-way radio between police officers and dispatchers that exists now. In 1943, the police department moved into the current fire station, where the first police radio was put into use.

## **The First Civilian Dispatchers in Cuyahoga Heights**

Prior to 1984, officers were dispatched by the patrolmen themselves. Patrolmen would handle all emergency calls for the communities of Cuyahoga Heights, Brooklyn Heights and Valley View. In 1984, the village decided to hire designated civilian dispatchers. After much discussion, village officials determined that hiring dispatchers would be more economical and would allow for more officers to be out on the road. A two-part exam was administered, which included a general knowledge section and an audible test using a portable police radio. The final portion of the hiring process was an interview with Police Chief Lawrence Mack. The results of the exam and interview were used to hire the village's first dispatchers: Sheri Schuschu and Christine Suhy. As noted by dispatcher Christine Suhy, there were between 15 to 20 applicants for the dispatch positions. The duties of the first dispatchers included: answering police, fire, and 911 calls; monitoring radio activity; handling the Law Enforcement Automatic Data (LEADS) entries; and performing jail duties as matron for female prisoners.

Dispatchers Schuschu and Suhy shared some of their experiences from their years as dispatchers for the village. Dispatcher Schuschu said that she was nervous when she first started; some of the older officers

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were not happy with civilian dispatchers because they felt that working the radio would be a job best suited for officers in their last few years on the job. However, dispatcher Schuschu said she never felt unwelcome. One of dispatcher Schuschu's favorite memories was walking or riding her bike to and from work. She stated that the officers on the road would make sure that she made it home every day.

Dispatcher Suhy shared that starting pay was a beginning patrolman's base pay cut in half. Some of the patrolman were hesitant when the civilian dispatchers were hired; they were concerned about their reduction of overtime possibilities. The officers were still assigned to the radio on the dispatchers off days, and on the shift when dispatchers Schuschu and Suhy needed a moment away from the radio.

Five years later in 1989, a third dispatcher, Barb Cash, was hired. With three dispatchers, a dispatcher was able to be assigned to each shift (mornings, afternoons, and nights). At that time, the dispatchers followed their shift, which consisted of a Captain, a Lieutenant, and two patrolmen. When the dispatcher had an off day or vacation day, a patrolman would cover that shift.

In 1997, the village hired the fourth full-time dispatcher, Tiffany Contipelli. By hiring another dispatcher, the department could ensure that the radio was covered by a civilian dispatcher at all times. This meant that the patrolmen would no longer need to work on the dispatch radio, freeing them up for more time on the road. Dispatcher Sandra Stover was also hired in 1997 as a 32-hour part-time dispatcher and, in 2000, dispatcher Brenda Poole was added as the second 32-hour part-time dispatcher.

### **Police Dispatch in Cuyahoga Heights from 2000 to Present: Evolution of Dispatch Technology, Infrastructure, and Services**

In January of 2000, our dispatch went from typing every log on a typewriter to entering every call into a Computer Aided Dispatch system (CAD). All calls for service, accidents, incidents, squad runs and fire calls are entered into a computer. This has been a great time saver for the dispatch center. Dispatcher Schuschu retired in 2001 and was replaced by a new full-time dispatcher, Cathy Zmija. By 2001, there was a total of four full-time and two 32-hour part-time dispatchers.

In 2006, dispatchers Scott Schoeffler and Brandy Zmija Murphy were hired to bring our total to six full-time dispatchers and two 32-hour part-time dispatchers. Dispatcher Murphy changed from a full-time dispatcher to part-time dispatcher in 2014.

A new police station was built in 2006 and opened for business in 2007. The dispatch center in the new building has its own kitchen and bathroom and is separate from the rest of the building. The dispatch center is considered part of the jail because the dispatchers can control the jail doors and watch all of the jail cameras on monitors located in the dispatch center. These monitors also contain the cameras that are located throughout the station, including hallways, parking lots around the station, and entry and exit doors. The dispatchers have the first contact with the public that comes into the station.

In 2008, the village signed contracts with the three villages that mandated that Cuyahoga Heights would have two dispatchers on the radio at all times. We also became emergency medical dispatchers, meaning our dispatchers can give pre-arrival instructions to the public over the phone while the rescue squad is on its way to the location of the emergency.





*Barb Cash and Christine Hanousek Dean*



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*2018 Cuyahoga Heights  
Police Department  
Emergency Dispatch*

Dispatch Supervisor Barb Cash



Dispatcher Brandy Murphy



Dispatcher Brenda Poole



Dispatcher Cathy Zmija



Dispatcher Danielle Short



Dispatcher Georgette Hodge



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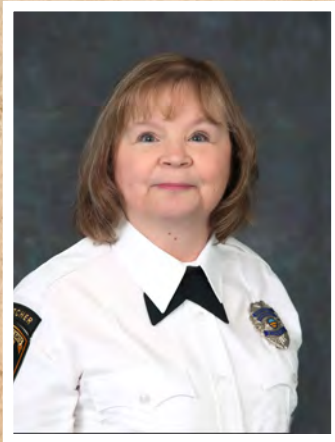
Dispatcher Jasmine Wallace



Dispatcher Melissa Mackiewicz



Dispatcher Nicole Fontaine



Dispatcher Sandra Stover



Dispatcher Scott Schoeffler



Dispatcher Tiffany Contipelli



Dispatcher Traci Ricco





*Cuyahoga Heights  
Police Department  
Emergency  
Dispatch Center  
prior to joining the  
Cuyahoga Valley  
Regional Dispatch  
Center*



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Also in 2008, the position of head dispatcher was created and outlined in the dispatch union contract. Dispatcher Barb Cash was voted head dispatcher at that time and still serves in this position. Duties include scheduling, payroll, training, and discipline. The head dispatcher also serves as a liaison between dispatch and all of the departments that we serve.

Our dispatch added the SwiftReach system, a system notifies residents and businesses by sending out messages and emergency warnings. With SwiftReach, an automatic call goes out to everyone entered into the system when a tornado warning is issued in Cuyahoga County by the National Weather Service. The dispatchers can also sound the Cuyahoga Heights emergency sirens if an emergency situation occurs. These sirens are located on top of the fire department, the end of Chapek Parkway, and on a building located on the Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District (NEORS) property. Emergency sirens are tested by dispatch on the first Saturday of every month at noon.

In 2012, our dispatch center added Newburgh Heights Police and Fire to our regional dispatch center. We now dispatch for their police and fire departments; answer their 911 calls, and enter their paperwork into our computer system. The dispatch center added to its technology in 2015, when monitors were set up in the dispatch center displaying live surveillance video of the Cuyahoga Heights School buildings. Dispatch now has the ability to monitor the hallways, gyms, auditorium, cafeteria, and exterior of the Cuyahoga Heights High School. In 2014, dispatcher Suhy retired after 30 years of service and dispatcher Murphy left a full-time position for a part-time position. At that time, two more dispatchers were hired: Danielle Short and Melissa Mackiewicz.

Emergency 911 phone services have come a long way since the start of police dispatch in the village. At the beginning of the 911 phone system, our dispatch did not have the address where the caller was calling from. We now have a high-resolution screen that will show the name, telephone number, and address of the caller. Cell phone 911 calls go to the Cuyahoga County Emergency Communications Center (CCECOM) first, then are transferred to the correct police or fire department.

The dispatch call recording technology has also evolved over time. A retired officer who worked from the 1950s through the 1980s shared that, at that time, they used a reel-to-reel tape machine to record all of the calls and radio traffic. The dispatch center used this same type of recording system through the 1990s. Dispatch changed the tape machine every night shift at 12:05 a.m., at which time the tapes would be labeled and retained for a month. After a month, the tapes would be demagnetized and used again. Now, the dispatch center uses a computer based recording system, where recordings can be saved forever.

On April 1, 2018, police, fire and dispatch changed to a new radio system—all of the police departments and fire departments that we serve are now on the Cleveland radio frequency. This system allows communication between dispatch, police officers, and firefighters to be much clearer. The Cleveland system has many radio towers located throughout Cuyahoga County. This eliminates areas in village that our old system could not reach. This also reduces problems with portable and mobile radio dead spots.



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Dispatchers are the unsung professionals of emergency services. Dispatchers gather the information from callers and dispatch the appropriate first responders to the scene. They must be able to take control of situations that may be chaotic, heart-wrenching, stressful, confusing, and hectic, while multi-tasking and keeping a level head at all times. Being a dispatcher can be a rewarding and fulfilling career. We are the lifeline to the public that we serve.

### **New things are happening with the Cuyahoga Heights Dispatch Center**

State laws are impacting local communities, mandating change and regionalization. In June, 2019, our dispatch center joined Brecksville, Independence, Broadview Heights and Seven Hills to form the Cuyahoga Valley Regional Dispatch Center. The new center was built in the City of Brecksville in 2018 and opened in March, 2019.