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THE ZETRON ADVANTAGE

A New Era for Tioga County





Zetron Systems Usher in New Era for Tioga County

Tioga County Emergency Services Director, David Cohick, consults with dispatcher, David Lacher, on a call.

The Zetron AcomEVO and MAX Call-Taking systems recently installed in Tioga County Pennsylvania's new 9-1-1 center provide the PSAP with a single-vendor solution that will allow them to share resources and backup operations across counties.

On June 3, 2015, the following radio announcement went out from David Cohick, Director of the Tioga County, Pennsylvania, Emergency Services Department, to the area's public-safety and law-enforcement agencies and first responders:

"In 1979 the Department of Emergency Services started operations in the basement of the Tioga County Courthouse... Over the past 36 years, the facility has handled over 1 million incidents and received several million phone calls for assistance. This is Tioga County Emergency Services at the court house signing off the air."

Moments later, the voice of Tioga County Quality Assurance Director, Lisa Rice, came on the air:

"Tioga County—all cars, stations, and departments: This is Tioga County Emergency Services... signing on the air from the top of the hill, 99 William Farrell Drive. We did it, Bob."

This was a momentous occasion for Tioga County Emergency Services and its 9-1-1 public safety answering point (PSAP). It signaled the completion of their move from their old communication center to an entirely new facility. It also marked their cutover to the center's state-of-the-art Zetron AcomEVO dispatch and IP-based MAX Call-Taking systems.

The "Bob" named in the second transmission was a reference to the late Robert R. Saylor, Tioga County's first emergency services director. He had been instrumental in creating the area's first emergency communication center. Although Saylor had passed away five years previously, he was on everyone's minds. This new center was something he would have wanted to see.

It was the end of an era for Tioga County. And the beginning of a new one.

Tioga County 9-1-1

Operating under the auspices of the Tioga County Department of Emergency Services, the Tioga County 9-1-1 Communications Center answers 9-1-1 calls and provides law-enforcement, ambulance, and public-safety dispatch for Tioga and Potter counties and several additional townships nearby. The center serves a population of about 90,000 and covers an area of 2,550 square miles—the largest geographic public-safety service area in the state.

“The updated Zetron equipment provides new capabilities that are critical to us now and will become even more so in the future. It’s state-of-the-art everything.”

David Cohick, Director, Emergency Services, Tioga County, PA

The need for change

Cohick explains why the time had come to set up and equip a new emergency services and 9-1-1 center. “Our dispatchers were elbow to elbow, and we had no room to grow,” he says. “Our location in the basement was vulnerable to flooding, and our equipment was not designed to take us to the next level of technology and service. We also felt it was important to move to IP-based systems that would allow us to share operations, resources, and backup across agencies. It was also the perfect time to adopt new 9-1-1 call-taking that will help prepare us for next-generation functionality, such as the ability to accept video and text, so we’ll be ready when the time comes for us to support it.”

Zetron is the vendor of choice

Zetron’s AcomEVO dispatch system and MAX Call-Taking systems were at the top of Tioga County’s list when it came to selecting equipment for their new center.

“Zetron was clearly the vendor of choice, based on the equipment itself and Tioga’s past experiences with Zetron,” says Mike McGrady of MCM Consulting Group, who assisted with the project. “Moving to Zetron’s latest-and-greatest would be an easier transition for their staff. Plus, having a single vendor for both systems would simplify maintenance, reduce costs, and give them a single point of contact for any questions or issues that might arise.”

AcomEVO and MAX Call-Taking also offered the top-of-the-line IP-based functionality and features Tioga County was seeking.

An additional bit of serendipity made Zetron’s AcomEVO even more attractive. Potter County no longer needed their existing Acom system. So Tioga would purchase it for their new center and keep their existing Acom running in the old center until the new center was cut over. This would allow them to continue their operations without interruption, even as the new center was being built and equipped. Tioga would also be able to upgrade the system in the new center very cost effectively to AcomEVO—which is a newer version of Acom.

Tioga County finalized their decision to purchase seven positions of AcomEVO and seven of MAX Call-Taking, as well as the attendant software and equipment required for each system.

Streamlined, simplified operations

Zetron engineer Doug Neal oversaw the system engineering and project implementation, with Tu-Way Communications of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, assisting with the installation.

The first phase involved removing the Acom system from Potter County and installing it at Tioga’s new center. The system was then updated with all of the necessary cards and software upgrades.

MAX Call-Taking was installed and integrated with AcomEVO. The equipment was then set up to allow dispatchers to control four computers and up to 16 screens with a single headset, keyboard, and mouse. “This functionality alone would have sold me on this equipment,” says Cohick. “I can’t emphasize enough the extent to which it streamlines and simplifies our operations and gives us seamless control of all these systems.”

Minimal training

To reduce the impact of change on dispatchers, the screens and icons on the AcomEVO system were designed to mimic those on their previous system. As a result, dispatchers were able to make the transition to AcomEVO with minimal training. Because the MAX Call-Taking user interface is quite different from the Zetron Series 3300 system Tioga had been using previously, it required more training. But thanks to the system’s intuitive design and operation, dispatchers caught onto it quickly as well.

‘Our dispatchers are beyond happy’

From all accounts, the project has been a great success.

“It was a fabulous deployment,” says Neal, “one of the best I’ve had.”

Dave Cohick concurs: “The transition was easy, thanks to the excellence of the systems, the great job Zetron did, and the efforts of our staff. Lisa Rice was instrumental in helping to develop the screen layouts that are so important to our dispatchers. Ever since the new center went online, everything has been working flawlessly.”

“Our dispatchers are beyond happy,” Cohick continues. “When they came in and sat down, and compared our dark, cramped old center to the new one, they said it’s like night and day. I’m very pleased. The updated Zetron equipment provides new capabilities that are critical to us now and will become more so in the future. It’s state-of-the-art everything.”

Grand opening

The grand opening of the new center September 11, 2015 was greeted with great fanfare. Members of the community, the media, and local and state government were all in attendance. Hundreds showed up to tour and admire the new facility.

What David Cohick didn’t realize when he was being interviewed for this story, and what was revealed during the dedication ceremony, is that the new facility would be named to honor his many years of service to Tioga County. Its official name: The David Cohick Emergency Operations Center.■