

Center speeds up sheriff's operations

BY JUSTIN FENTON
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An enhanced nerve center for the Anne Arundel County Sheriff's Office will streamline operations and improve safety, officials said yesterday.

The new operations center, in a former break room on the first floor of the Anne Arundel County Circuit Courthouse, is larger and features newly installed communications systems that link to the county police department's 911 call center to aid deputies as they serve warrants or eviction notices.

Perhaps one of the biggest improvements, deputies say, is the proximity to the warrants themselves.

When a law enforcement officer has someone pulled over on a traffic stop who is believed to have an open warrant, the sheriff's office needs to quickly verify that suspect's status so an arrest can be made.

But those who are fielding the calls and the drawers and drawers of warrants they need to thumb through were located on opposite ends of the courthouse, wasting precious time.

"We want to minimize the time a trooper or officer has to spend at a traffic stop," said Lt. Dennis Czorapinski, from the sheriff's operations bureau. "We want to make sure that warrant is in hand as quickly as possible."

Sheriff Ron Bateman and County Executive John R. Leopold appeared yesterday at a brief ceremony to mark the center's opening, though it has been running
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Center speeds sheriff work

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since July.

Bateman said that the operations center had been in the works for more than a year and that new equipment was purchased using about \$135,000 left over from the previous budget.

"The majority of their work has to do with this side of the building," Bateman said. "It's a round peg in a round hole."

Added Leopold: "In cases of emergency, there's an opportunity to communicate to the maximum extent possible."

The sheriff's office is responsible for providing court security and serving warrants. The agency's role has grown over the years. It handles about 10,000 outstanding warrants, oversees a four-story downtown courthouse and plays a lead role in domestic violence resolution.

Twenty-four hours a day, two staffers work from the operations center. They sit in front of multiple computer monitors, with a block of four televisions nearby that carry feeds from more than 80 security cameras throughout the building.

Although the sheriff's office does not respond to 911 calls, the communications center can now access the police department's computer-aided dispatch system and advise the sheriff's deputies of past responses by the county police at a given address.

Dispatchers can relay any cautionary notes attached to an address to alert deputies to any potential dangers as they attempt to serve a warrant or supervise a court-ordered eviction.

The new system allows the sheriff's dispatchers to monitor the Annapolis City police and county tactical radio channels.

Should deputies activate their emergency status — a button on their radios that alerts dispatchers they are in trouble — the sheriff's office now receives that alert along with the county police, speeding identification of the deputy and alerting backup if needed.

Shifting operations across the building prompted other upgrades, such as a new DVR recording system for court security camera feeds.

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