



By Scott Daugherty — The Capital

Hope Trently uses the new communications equipment at the sheriff's department's upgraded communications center at the county courthouse.

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Sheriff's department now has quicker way to check warrants

By SCOTT DAUGHERTY
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Last year, if a police officer called the county Sheriff's Office about an outstanding warrant, a dispatcher had to run about 100 yards to a series of file cabinets on the other side of the county courthouse in Annapolis.

That made it tough to meet federal guidelines.

The FBI gives the office only 10 minutes to confirm a warrant while an officer stands at the side of the road with a potentially wanted person, county officials said.

"It just wasn't safe," said Sheriff Ron Bateman, explaining that the journey to the files included maneuvering through a public corridor and several security doors.

But now such treks are a distant memory, thanks to a \$135,000 communication center that opened July

15 next to several file cabinets brimming with more than 10,000 unserved warrants, Sheriff Bateman said.

"It allows them to be right next to the paper they need to touch," he said yesterday at a ceremonial ribbon-cutting, flanked by his command staff and County Executive John R. Leopold. "I wanted to minimize that time delay. ... A quicker confirmation is safer for everyone."

Sheriff Bateman said the new, larger communication center, which features "state of the art" equipment, also links the office to the county Police Department's 911 call center and helps deputies serve their warrants, court orders and eviction notices.

The center consists of two dispatch work stations, a bank of four security cameras carrying feeds from more than 80 cameras located throughout the courthouse, and several computer screens and wipe

boards. It occupies the deputies' old break room in the basement of the courthouse.

Money the office saved in the last fiscal year while operating with 13 deputy vacancies paid for the center, Sheriff Bateman said.

Lt. Dennis Czorapinski, who oversaw the installation of the new facility, said the communication center is staffed 24 hours a day with two dispatchers. They work with the county's 911 call center in Millersville, but the sheriff's dispatchers only keep tabs on deputies. The sheriff's dispatchers also are responsible for fielding calls from other departments trying to confirm warrants flagged on the FBI's National Crime Information Center.

Communication Supervisor Hope Trently said the job forces her and her dispatchers to become experts in

(See SHERIFF, Page B6)

SHERIFF

(Continued from Page B1)

multitasking.

"We are always constantly doing something else," she said, sitting in front of three computer monitors and next to a bank of security cameras.

The office's old communication center was about two-thirds the size of the new one and shared space with the courthouse telephone junction box.

There, dispatchers used jerry-rigged police car radios and a single computer that gave them access only to the sheriff's com-

puter-aided dispatching system, Lt. Czorapinski said. That meant that if a county deputy serving warrants on the street got in trouble, county police would have to call the sheriff's office by phone just to figure out who was out there and what he was doing.

In the new communication center, however, sheriff's dispatchers can monitor city and county police dispatch systems, help to expedite backup, and even check addresses in advance to alert deputies to potential problems, Lt. Czorapinski said.

The switch over to the new communication center also let the sheriff's office create a new

circuit courthouse security command center using mostly leftover equipment and monitors.

Sgt. Don Scates said the office did upgrade its security cameras, though. The cameras are the same, but the surveillance footage is now captured on five digital video recorders instead of an old VCR, he said.

Sgt. Scates said Sheriff Bateman and Mr. Leopold were very open to upgrading the courthouse systems.

"They were both like, 'Let's come out of the dark ages,' " he said.

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