

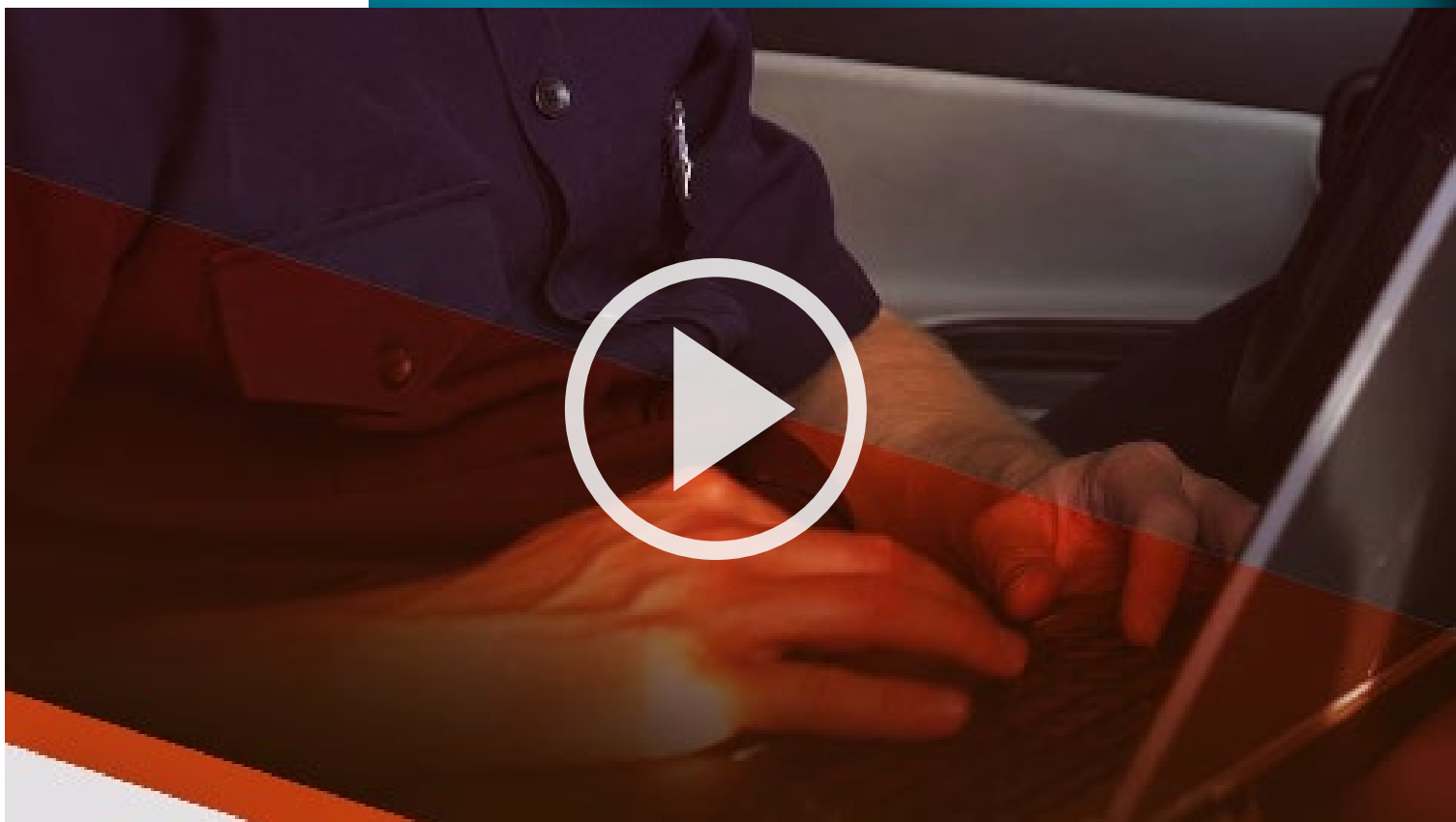


The POSITIVE RESPONSE

When the City of Coral Springs embarked on a formidable 911 dispatch system upgrade, the technology was only one part of the municipality's success. The other? The city government's culture of excellence.

Emergency response communication systems are a no-fail proposition. It takes the highest level of expertise to keep these lifelines accessible and operable for every second of every day. In 2013, Broward County undertook an ambitious project to bring 911 call management and dispatch under one roof. While most of the 31 municipalities opted in, two cities chose to keep control of their 911 systems, and Coral Springs was one of them. There are different methodologies for handling 911 calls, each with their own pros and cons. The Coral Springs practice ensures calls are responded to in the quickest possible manner, which was the deciding factor for keeping control. Seconds equal lives when it comes to first response.

In 2019, the neighboring city of Coconut Creek sought to have Coral Springs take over their emergency response communications after having given up their own call center six years earlier. The Coral Springs City Manager, having come up the ranks through public safety, felt obligated to entertain the idea knowing that the city's 911 call management and dispatch services provide the highest level of service. Shortly thereafter the two cities entered into a cost neutral agreement, and Coral Springs CIO Stephen Dyer was tasked with connecting the two city networks together ensuring calls coming into Coral Springs were being routed to Coconut Creek in real-time.





RESPOND FASTER & MANAGE SMARTER

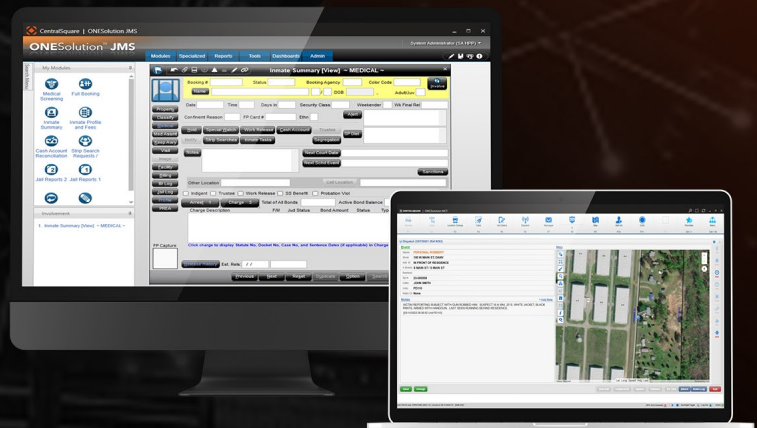
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"The most impressive part is there was zero downtime. When the switch occurred not a single 911 call went unanswered, and every call entered into our CAD system made it to the correct fire, EMS, or police officer terminal."

Stephen Dyer, Chief Information Officer,
City of Coral Springs, Florida

SEE FOR YOURSELF




Apart from what you'd expect – choosing technology, building infrastructure, and laser focus on cybersecurity – the driving force behind the project was the powerful culture that allowed Dyer to build an exceptional team and execute the 911 expansion while at the same time also installing a new ERP – a grueling challenge in its own right.

Knowledge & Culture

Dyer thinks the city has a “fantastic culture” that enabled him to develop a team of employees who, in his estimation, work together better than any other similar-sized municipal IT department in the country. The diverse group

consists of highly certified analysts who work cohesively while producing at an exceptional level. This culture is fostered by the city's philosophy of genuinely caring for their employees.

“It's all about leadership,” he said. “At the end of the day, I'm the luckiest CIO in the state of Florida, and it's because I've got the best team and I work for an amazing organization.” Dyer joined the city in 2013 as a Database Analyst. Prior to his promotion to Director of Information Technology Systems in February 2019, he served as a Network Engineer, Infrastructure Manager, and Assistant Director.



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"I literally started as a lift station maintenance worker 34 years ago. I worked my way up the blue-collar ranks and jumped over to IT. I then worked myself up to my role as CIO for this municipality." Clearly, Dyer's trajectory is inspiration for creating a lasting culture of service among his 30 or so team members.

Working in municipal government pays less than working for traditional business, but Dyer's elevator pitch to potential IT department hires has been wildly successful.

"We're a big enough organization that we have all the bells and whistles. We have

the latest and greatest cybersecurity tools. We've got next generation firewalls, network access control systems, fiber channel storage area networks, virtual servers, on premise voice over IP as well as many others," he said. "We're big enough to have all the cool tools, but we're small enough that no one can specialize in anything. Everyone is expected to learn as much as they can about all of our technologies. If you want to learn, we will feed you with a fire hose!" Support from the City Manager's Office makes it possible for Dyer to provide superior training for his staffers.



**“If you create the right culture,
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Stephen Dyer





“My staff knows at the end of the day that the work they’re doing is all about what’s best for our citizens. It’s never about shareholder profits, so that gives them a little bit of extra motivation. People tend to work a little harder when they know the work they are doing is making a difference to our community.” Staffers are encouraged to give input and contribute to every project, and leadership reinforces that everyone is valued and heard.

“My management team and I work on this all the time. When you thank somebody, you talk about what they did, the impact it had on the organization and how it made us feel as a management team. That really goes a long way to show appreciation for our staff,” he stressed. “When people have that they get a sense of fulfillment. If you create the right culture, have the right leadership model and get everybody on board it becomes an unstoppable force.”

Connecting Coral Springs' 911 primary service answering point to Coconut Creek mobile terminals

The multi-year project physically connected the cities' networks, which required building an entirely new DMZ (demilitarized zone) network. Switches, routers, physical servers, virtual machines, and security controls were brand new, as was the new instance of CAD software. Dyer's team engineered and installed the new DMZ and created trust relationships from Coral Springs' network to the new DMZ, and from the DMZ to Coconut Creek's network while meeting CJIS (criminal justice information systems) security standards.

“Apart from the CAD software itself, we did everything in-house,” Dyer said.

CentralSquare Technologies, developer of the CAD software, was an important partner in the project. They assisted Dyer’s team in installing the new instance of CAD software as well as aiding both Coral Springs and Coconut Creek in migrating the law, fire, and EMS personnel to the new CAD instance. Dyer said “the most impressive part is there was zero downtime. When the switch occurred not a single 911 call went unanswered, and every call entered into our CAD system made it to the correct fire, EMS, or police officer terminal.”

Dyer credits CentralSquare project manager April Herbert with linking the ideal specialists for each step in the integration. “She was the glue that kept the whole thing working together,” he enthused. CentralSquare’s Technical team leader Richard de la Cruz guided the Coral Springs team through the challenging configuration. “They were absolutely awesome, and I’m super grateful that they were part of the project. They are the reason the project went smoothly.”

Dyer brought the conversation back to the Coral Springs’ government ethos. “Nobody wants to let anybody else down, and that creates a really strong culture. When you have that culture, people will blow away whatever expectations you have of them. Our department is very understaffed when benchmarked against other municipalities and local governments, but we’re still tackling these massive projects and knocking them out of the park.” ■



