

# 911 nerve center: Dispatchers' role is growing

PHOTOS: BILLY LUX

**P**rior to Nov. 12, 2000, San Francisco's 911 emergency call screeners and police dispatchers were located in the Hall of Justice, at 850 Bryant St. Fire emergencies were relayed to firefighter dispatchers at 1003 Turk St., and medical emergencies were relayed to paramedic dispatchers at 2789 25th St.

Now, not only are all three functions located under the same roof at 1011 Turk St., but police dispatchers are currently being trained to handle fire and medical emergencies, thus freeing up the firefighter and paramedics who currently handle their respective dispatching.

"Calls still come in to our police dispatchers first," says Kerry Dalrymple, director of Client Services for S.F.'s Emergency Communications Department. "But now if it's for fire or medical, they transfer the call across the room instead of across town."

"Hopefully, we'll have our personnel ready to take all three types of calls by Dec. 1," Dalrymple said.

Due to the stressful nature of the job, the city's Emergency Communications Department is constantly hiring. "We should have 144 dispatchers and now we're down pretty low, to 130," she says. The field is predominantly female, but more and more men are getting into the line of work. Dalrymple believes this is because more guys now know how to type, thanks to computers, and because more are realizing this is not just a clerical job.

"During initial training, a lot of people wash out or decide this is not the job for them," says Dalrymple. "Some people can't remove themselves from the telephone call. It really has to be in you to do the job. Every once in a while you

you're talking to them and you can hear them dying, and you make it through those calls. Then 15 years later in your career, you get a call of someone having a heart attack and that will be the call that will send you over.

"I just had a dispatcher the other day who had a call like that. She's been in here 20 years. It really broke her down to tears. Maybe it's an accumulation or maybe it reminded her of some-

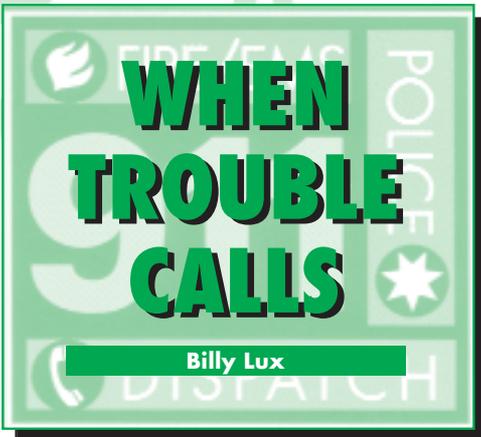
were being taken seriously. She assured the audience that dispatchers handle every call and that calls are usually taken in order, but that they also have to be prioritized.

"Say someone calls about a guy urinating in front of a building," she says, "then somebody else calls about a guy bugging passers-by. They may seem like the same level of nuisance, but the guy urinating is probably done and gone, while the other guy is still actively bothering people. The active complaint, the continued nuisance, has to be handled first, but I will still send an officer out to see if the guy who urinated is hanging around.

"If something is still happening but has changed, say the guy bugging people starts spitting on people, some callers think, 'Well, I already called the police, so they'll be out.' But that's an assault, and that would mean upgrading the call. It's important that if the situation changes, people call us back and



Kerry Dalrymple: "The active complaint has to be handled first."



Billy Lux



The 911 nerve center: A battery of computers.

answer a call that gets to you. You may have handled the worst calls in the world, like the 101 California incident or someone getting stabbed on the phone while

thing in her personal life and all of a sudden she got swept into the telephone call. We do have people here who help deal with that, who debrief the dispatchers and help them decompress."

In January, Dalrymple came to the Tenderloin police station's community meeting and answered questions from citizens concerned about whether their reporting of quality-of-life crimes

let us know so we can prioritize."

According to Dalrymple, in the rest of the city, the majority of the calls come in during the day, starting around 9 a.m. and dying down around 4 p.m. when businesses start to close and people are going home. "But in the Tenderloin," she says, "that's just when the switchboard is starting to light up, and then stays active till about 10 p.m. There's a lot of night activity on the streets of the Tenderloin. It's very alive in a very concentrated area. The majority of the calls involve drug dealers, prostitutes, and quality-of-life crimes, not so much violent crimes. And most of the calls come from residents, not business owners. We also get a lot of calls from Tenderloin people who have mental problems and are calling from pay phones, not to report a crime but just to talk." ■

## Community meetings: Regular

### TENANT ASSOCIATIONS COALITION

2nd Mon. of the month, 12:30 p.m., 111 Jones Community Room. Contact Michael Nulty, 339-8327. Resident unity, leadership training.

### S.F. SAFE KIDS

2nd Tue. of the month. Contact Ana Validzic, 206-3350. Child health and safety.

### TENDERLOIN FUTURES COMMITTEE

2nd Wed. of the month, 10 a.m., 121 Golden Gate. Contact Roscoe Hawkins, 592-2704, or Katie Mullin, 776-2151 for information. Network of residents, nonprofits and businesses sharing information and taking on neighborhood development issues where the Lower Eddy/Leavenworth Task Force left off.

### MID-MARKET PROJECT AREA COMMITTEE

2nd Wed. of the month, 5:30 p.m., Ramada Hotel, 1231 Market. Contact Carolyn Diamond, 362-2500. Market Street redevelopment from Fifth to Eighth streets.

### POLICE STATION COMMUNITY MEETING

Last Wed. of the month, 6 p.m., police station Community Room, 301 Eddy. Contact Susan Black, 345-7300. Neighborhood safety.

### SENIORS AND DISABLED MEETING

Last Thur. of the month, 10 a.m., police station Community Room, 301 Eddy. Contact Susan Black, 345-7300. Concerns specific to seniors and the disabled.

### VIOLENCE PREVENTION NETWORK

Last Tue. of month, 10 a.m., 220 Golden Gate, Rm. 4D. Contact Christina Goette, 554-2741. Violence prevention.

### SUPPORTIVE HOUSING NETWORK

4th Thur. of the month, 3 p.m. Dorothy Day Community Room, 54 McAllister. Contact 241-2926. Supportive housing issues, tenant leadership training.

## Meetings: Call for schedule

### ALLIANCE FOR A BETTER DISTRICT 6

Monthly general and committee meetings. Contact Michael Nulty, 820-1560 or sf\_district6@yahoo.com. Districtwide association, civic education.

### NORTH OF MARKET PLANNING COALITION

Monthly meeting. Contact Garrett Jenkins, 474-2164. TL 2000, jobs, neighborhood planning.

### NORTH OF MARKET NERT TEAM

Monthly meeting. Contact Marvis Phillips, 674-1995 or Tim Agar, 673-1500. Earthquake safety and preparedness.

## At the Main Library

### APRIL 9, LATINO/HISPANIC COMMUNITY MEETING ROOM, 6:30 P.M.

*Open Books: Writers at the Library* — Cultural historian Marilyn Yalom will discuss her new book, *A History of the Wife*. Yalom also wrote *A History of the Breast*.

### APRIL 9, KORET AUDITORIUM, 6-8 P.M.

Meeting San Francisco's Growing Electricity Needs — A panel discussion on alternative energy sources such as solar and wind power and discussion of a plan being developed to help the city meet its energy needs with minimal impact to neighborhoods and environment.

### APRIL 10, KORET AUDITORIUM, 6 P.M.

21st Century African American Writers Series with poets Reginald Lockett, devorah major and Adam David Miller. Cellist Kash Killian performs live. In conjunction with photography exhibits in the Jewett Gallery and African American Center.

### APRIL 11, KORET AUDITORIUM, 6-7:30 P.M.

Open Books — *Mother tongue*, the feminist theatre collective, performs its new show, "Sisterspeak," a collage of dialogues, poems, stories and songs.

### APRIL 14, LATINO/HISPANIC COMMUNITY MEETING ROOM, 2-4 P.M.

A book talk and signing by author Ruth Lum McCunn. Her new novel, *The Moon Pearl*, draws

from the lives of the real 19th century heroines of China's Pearl River Delta.

### APRIL 17, LATINO/HISPANIC COMMUNITY MEETING ROOM, 4:30 P.M.

ZYZZYVA Presents Amazing Women: Journalist and radio commentator Susan Parker, avid outdoorswoman who reports on life with her quadriplegic husband, injured in a cycling accident. Her memoir, *Tumbling After*, will be published this spring.

### APRIL 17, KORET AUDITORIUM, 6 P.M.

21st Century African American Writers Series with poets Opal Palmer Adisa, Diem Jones and Avotcja. Cellist Kash Killian performs live.

### APRIL 18, LATINO/HISPANIC COMMUNITY MEETING ROOM, 6 P.M.

Historic Walks in San Francisco, 18 Trails Through the City's Past — Lecture and slide show presented by author Rand Richards.

### APRIL 20, KORET AUDITORIUM, 1-2:30 P.M.

Talk and demonstration by San Francisco Chronicle cartoonist Phil Frank — "Farley." A small exhibit of environmental "Farley" comics will be on display on the 5th floor main lobby through April 30.

### APRIL 20, LATINO/HISPANIC COMMUNITY MEETING ROOM, 2-4 P.M.

Teen Issues: Discussion and Advice, a talk in Chinese by Frank Chen, counselor at Youth Guidance Center. Topics: teen crime prevention, family relationships, East and West cultural differences and case studies.

### APRIL 21, LATINO/HISPANIC COMMUNITY MEETING ROOM, 1-4 P.M.

Gendertalk 2: A Community Dialogue. Butch lesbians, femme lesbians, female-to-male transgender people and gender queers talk about race, gender and sexual orientation in a facilitated conversation.

### APRIL 21, KORET AUDITORIUM, 2-3 P.M.

San Francisco Circus Center presents "Under the Big Top," an afternoon of acrobatics, clowning, contortion, juggling. Featuring performers from New Pickle Circus, Clown Conservatory and San

Francisco Youth Circus.

### APRIL 23, KORET AUDITORIUM, 6:30 P.M.

Open Books/Alternative Voices with Los Delicados, a group of Latino performance poets from San Francisco.

### APRIL 25, KORET AUDITORIUM, 6:30 P.M.

An Evening with Andrew Solomon, winner of the 2001 National Book Award for Non-Fiction for *The Noonday Demon: An Atlas of Depression*.

### APRIL 27, COFFEE RECEPTION:

LATINO/HISPANIC COMMUNITY MEETING ROOM, 10-10:30 A.M., AND SYMPOSIUM: KORET AUDITORIUM, 10:30 A.M.-5 P.M. Bay Area Dancing, The Early Years 1915-1965 — Lectures, slide presentations, film and video celebrating ballet, modern and ethnic dance artists. In conjunction with the Bay Area Celebrates National Dance Week (April 19-28).

### APRIL 30, RECEPTION: LATINO/HISPANIC COMMUNITY MEETING ROOM, 5:30 P.M.;

ADDRESS KORET AUDITORIUM, 6:30 P.M. Inaugural address by the third San Francisco poet laureate, devorah major.

## For Children at Main Library

### APRIL 13, FISHER CHILDREN'S CENTER, 1-2:30 P.M.

Family Saturdays: Children's Book Press art education program with author Chiori Santiago. Participating families receive a copy of Santiago's book, *Home to Medicine Mountain*.

### APRIL 13, KORET AUDITORIUM, 2-4:30 P.M.

River of Words 2002: Announcement ceremony and celebration of youth poetry and art contest winners.

### APRIL 20, FISHER CHILDREN'S CENTER, 2-4 P.M.

Beginning Bird Watching For Kids with Betsy Berberian. Learn to identify birds through games and activities, watch some birds with binoculars and make your own bird book. Ages 7 and up.