



Never too big for Santa

Ginger Stevens took her turn on Santa's lap at the annual program at the Daddow-Isaacs American Legion post in Dallas last Sunday. (Post photo/Charlotte Bartizek)

911

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are funding inconsistencies. "Why should some communities which recently joined the county's system have to pay for it, while others get a free ride?" he asked, referring to Harveys Lake Borough's recent decision to withdraw from the Back Mountain system, where it paid \$23,000 a year, to go on the current county dispatching system, which the borough now uses for free. "Any 911 system, local or county-wide, cannot be a freeloader system," said Dallas Township Chief of Police Carl Miers. "Some communities have shirked their duty to provide service to their residents and have left everything up to the state police and the county. They have been waiting for the county's 911, so that they don't have to pay for it. That's not fair." Although Miers called the \$1.25 a month charge "cheap insurance," he said that a county-wide system's costs and revenues must be shared more equitably. Box and Sabol agreed that the Back Mountain's system can serve its residents more effectively than a county-wide setup.

The Back Mountain has two of the best communications consoles available, a computer link to state and federal criminal records, equipment to tape all incoming calls, special communications equipment for the deaf and ongoing training programs, Sabol said. Sabol has been chairman of the board of the Back Mountain communications center since its inception as a police dispatching center in 1986. Two years ago the

center, known as "Back Mountain control," set up a regional 911 system, which works similarly to a call-forwarding system. In an emergency, anyone can contact the Back Mountain center from their home or a telephone booth on the 674, 675, 696, 477 and 639 exchanges for free. You don't even need a quarter. "We can work with Commonwealth Telephone to upgrade to what they call a true 911 in a month and have the more sophisticated enhanced 911 within a year," Sabol said. Sabol added that Macekura never asked the Luzerne County Police Chiefs' Association for input. "We formed a committee to work on county-wide 911, but no one ever asked us to do anything," he said. Sabol said that fire and ambulance companies must also be involved in designing any 911 plan for Luzerne County. Macekura admitted that the county-wide system has several flaws that must be corrected: • Certain areas have trouble receiving radio transmissions, which might necessitate either using satellites to relay them or setting up a second communications center. • Overlap areas, such as Franklin Township, need special details ironed out. Currently Franklin Township residents on the 333 or 388 telephone exchanges dial directly into Wyoming County's zoned 911 system, which dispatches the necessary emergency services. But when Franklin Township residents on the 675 telephone exchange dial 911, they get Back

Mountain control, which then contacts Wyoming County for dispatching. Patton said that agreements with adjoining counties would need to be worked out for these special cases. • Dispatchers will need a means of determining which calls are life-threatening and which aren't, since the county-wide system would handle only life-threatening situations which account for only two to four percent of all police calls, Macekura said. "Sometimes it's tough, even for an experienced police officer, to sort out the true emergencies and be 100 percent sure," Miers said. • Someone would have to handle the large volume of non-emergency calls which include complaints about kids throwing snowballs, dog problems and people reporting violations of local burning ordinances. "Using a county-wide 911 system won't cause the emergency services to get there faster. It's just more efficient," Patton said. Sabol said that he and his fellow police chiefs have many questions, such as jurisdiction, liability and responsibility, which the county must deal with in setting up its own 911 system. "Presently, joining a county-wide 911 system is clearly not in the best interests of Kingston Township," Box said. "I think we should lobby against a county-wide system and work towards developing our own enhanced 911 system right here in the Back Mountain."

Alarms

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Also, anyone considering the installation of a fire or burglar alarm must apply for a permit. Cost of the permit will be \$25 and interested persons should contact Zoning Officer Ben Gorey. Box does not think the fines are exorbitant. "I don't feel that these fees are excessive, in relation to costs," said Box. "These fees are intended to be an incentive to the owners. We want to make it clear to the owners that it (the ordinance) is here for their protection as well."

Police Chief Paul Sabol agrees. "I think it's a good idea," said Sabol, whose patrolmen responded to nearly 200 alarm calls in 1992. "It's here for the people's protection. We're hoping the fee will make the people more responsible. When an alarm goes off at night, we have to send two patrol cars to investigate. A false alarm takes the officers away from another duty." In another matter, the township will propose an ordinance enforcing state legislation regarding burned out or fire-damaged buildings.

The state House recently passed legislation allowing local municipalities to obtain a portion of a fire insurance settlement and hold it in escrow until the structure is repaired or torn down. The ordinance allows for the township to use the funds to repair or destroy the structure if the owner fails to do so. The township can obtain \$1,000 for each \$20,000 of insurance. If the property is valued at \$20,000 or less, then \$1,000 can be held in escrow.

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