

Comm Center

(continued from page 1)

mitted to set up a 911 system and finance it by a charge on each phone line," explained Melnick, who said the BMCC is asking for the current \$1.25 monthly charge per line to go to them. "We are a regional 911 system. We serve a specific geographical area, the Back Mountain."

Melnick said the county and attorney general's office tend to think the law only pertains to counties.

The trial date is set for October, but Melnick said they have been trying to settle the lawsuit out of court since its filing in 1994. "We haven't gotten a straight answer yet from the county," he said.

Marco Bourne of the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency said the state supports countywide systems, but stresses that individual counties and municipalities should work to determine what is safest for the community.

"Single systems are encouraged," said Bourne. "Multiple dispatch centers can be a cumbersome process." When asked if slower service or dispatchers unfamiliar with the area could cause problems, Bourne said many old issues like these do not occur often.

Bourne said the new "enhanced" systems are cost and safety effective. "The state's two main concerns are that the community is served and that systems are technologically possible," he said. "The state won't step in (between counties and municipalities)."

Luzerne County's "enhanced" system will be state-of-the-art, according to Ron Rome, intragovernmental coordinator for Luzerne County Emergency System. Rome said the many features of the "enhanced" system will prove effective in getting better emergency and non-emergency service to the entire county.

A caller's phone number and address pop up on the dispatcher's screen before the phone rings. Rome said this is important in case someone called, had to hang up and could not get back to the phone. "At least we have an address to go on," he said. Rome said in this situation a police car is always dispatched to the address just in case.

Some supporters of the BMCC think this system could be a burden to keep current and question

"Multiple dispatch centers can be a cumbersome process."

Marco Bourne
PA Emergency Management Agency

whether non-local people could accurately give addresses to local emergency units due to the many rural route addresses.

"The BMCC works great. They know the people and the area," said Brian Johnson, Trucksville fire chief.

Rome said the county's system will be kept current by phone company records. "We expect hundreds of changes daily," said Rome. "Also, we're going to make sure we verify the address. It's mainly a safeguard in case they hang up."

In the case of rural routes, Rome said a "ghost addressing" process will eliminate the problem. "We will go in and address the rural routes. It will be an internal system just for our mapping purposes. For example, if it's RR2, we will call it RR2 Maple St.," he said.

Charles Innamorati, customer service supervisor for the Dallas post office, said out of the approximately 5,600 Back Mountain residents the post office serves, about 3,000 have street addresses.

Regardless of the "enhanced" system, many think the loss of local dispatchers and a smaller center will result in the loss of fast and efficient service.

James Balavage, Kingston Township police chief, is in full support of keeping the BMCC. He believes the benefits lie in fast dispatching, a small number of police units on one frequency, which creates a higher level of efficiency for police officers themselves, and the Uniscope System that is used for criminal history checks.

Balavage believes Back Mountain inclusion in the county system will put the police in a ticklish situation. "At the BMCC, all calls get dispatched as soon as they come in, both emergency and non-emergency. The county will put non-emergency calls on a protocol system," he said.

Balavage used an example of a loud party on a weeknight. "It's 1

a.m. and you have to get up at 5 a.m. You call the county to report it and they may sit on it for a while. By the time the police get there it's half an hour later and your upset with the police," he said.

He also mentioned smaller, community services the BMCC provides. "If people call and want to find out which roads will be closed for the Memorial Day parade, they wouldn't get that infor-

mation right away because the county dispatcher wouldn't know and would have to tell them to call the police, who most likely aren't in the office. Ultimately the public will blame the police," said Balavage, who believes since the police have the most contact with people, they will take the flack for inconvenience.

Rome said the 911 system is set up to serve the police and rescue teams. "We are an inter-

face between the people and emergency workers," he said. "If Balavage wants to know every time there's an accident report, we'll tell him. We don't make decisions, we do what the police departments tell us. They will set the policy and procedure."

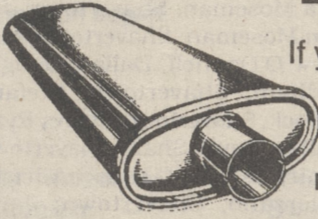
But, critics think the county already has too much on its plate. "Just by turning on the radio, you can tell the county isn't good at providing service," said Wagner.

"Just by turning on the radio, you can tell the county isn't good at providing service."

Frank Wagner
Dallas Twp. supervisor

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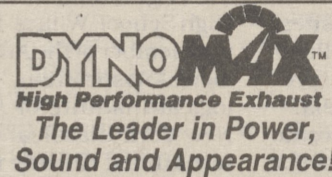
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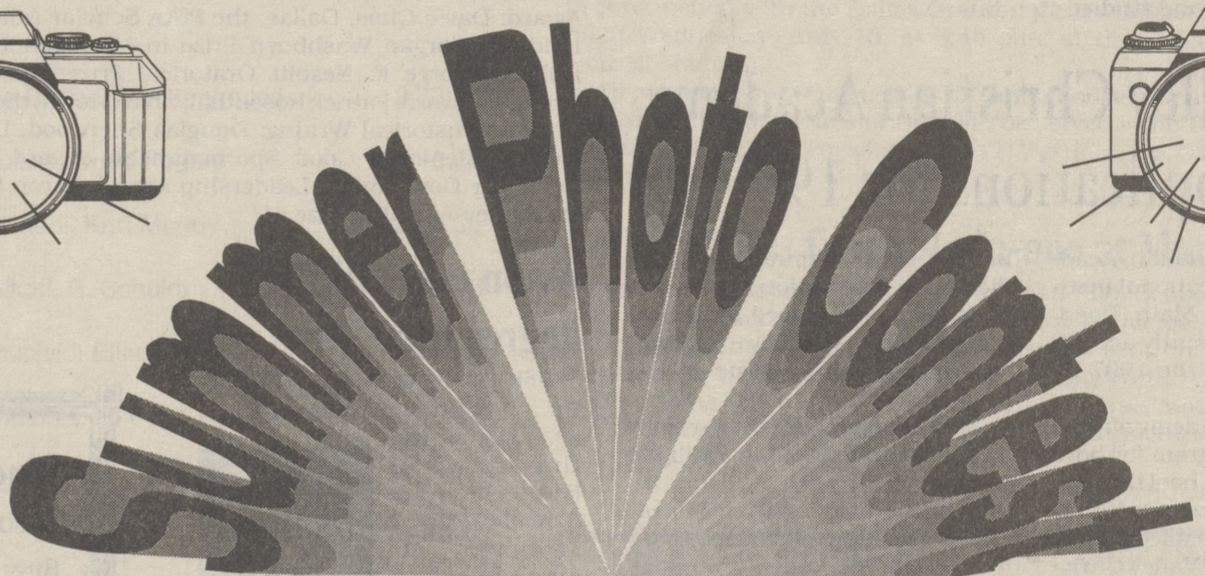
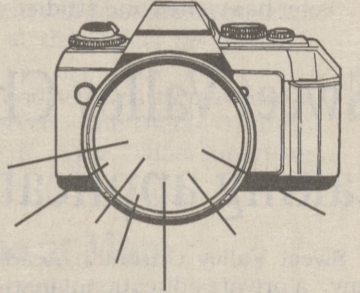
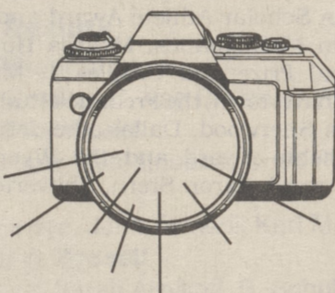
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1. Photos must have been taken between May 1 and August 31, 1997.
2. Submit up to three of your favorite photos by Friday, Sept. 12. The subject matter is your choice, but remember that photos will be judged on originality, composition and overall quality.
3. Include a completed entry blank. You may use the one below, or fill one out at the office of The Dallas Post or at Dallas Photo when you drop off your photos.

That's all there is to it. We'll hold your photos for pickup after the contest is over, and winners will be notified by phone or mail. Winning photos will be published in the September 24 issue of The Dallas Post along with a brief article about the circumstances in which they were taken.

Photos will be judged by a three-person panel of experts. Professional photographers (anyone earning 25% or more of their annual income through photography) may not enter

Don't forget - Deadline for entries is Friday, Sept. 12 at 5 p.m.

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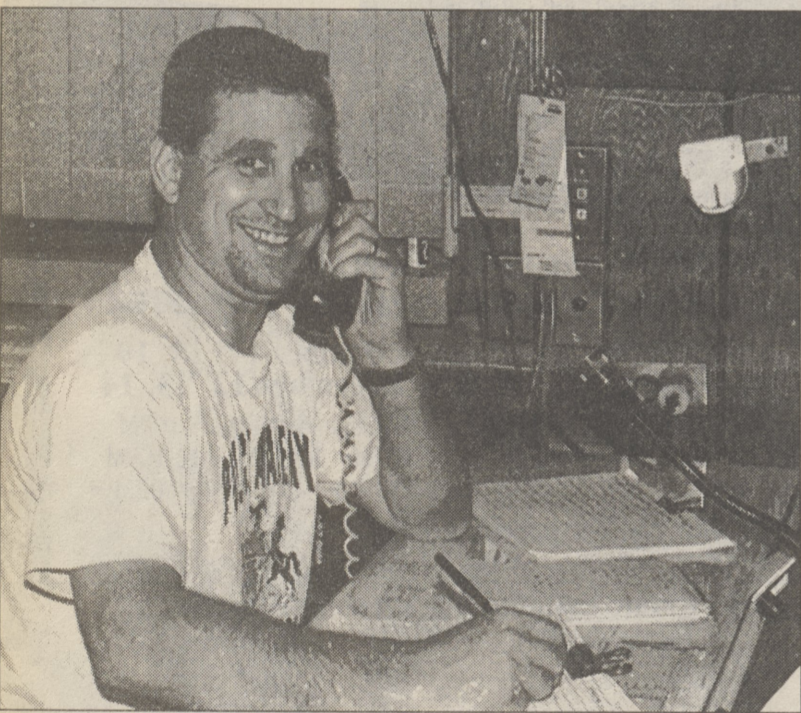
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POST PHOTO/KYLIE SHAFFERKOEETTER

Barry Stubeda, a Jackson Township patrolman and dispatcher-in-training, takes a phone call at the Back Mountain Communications Center in Dallas Township. The center's fate is unsure because the county wants to include the Back Mountain in its new countywide 911 system.

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