

Joining Forces to Beat Recruiting Challenges

By Greg Ballentine, MARC

Several public safety agencies in the Kansas City metropolitan area have joined in a highly unusual effort to jointly recruit personnel to staff some of the region's 9-1-1 centers. The Kansas City (MO) Police Department, Independence (MO) Police Department, Overland Park (KS) Police Department, Gladstone (MO) Public Safety and the Clay County (MO) Sheriff's Office are participating in this program.

The recruiting campaign kicked-off in early March with a series of radio ads encouraging potential employees to join "Team 9-1-1—one of the most exciting and rewarding career fields around." Ads were also placed in national trade magazines and on more than a dozen web sites.

Planning for the campaign began approximately one year ago when several agencies approached the Mid-America Regional Council (MARC) for assistance in dealing with the continuing problem of high turnover and recruiting 9-1-1 personnel. Local agencies in the Kansas City area have been working together for years on a number of public safety initiatives. It seemed logical that agencies could work together to improve the "applicant pool."

The Kansas City area has enjoyed an outstanding economy for the past several years. The very low unemployment rate across the region has presented agencies with recruiting challenges previously not experienced. Formerly, agencies could place an ad in the classified section of the newspaper and count on receiving hundreds of applications. This had changed.

Public safety agencies in the Kansas City region realized that non-traditional recruiting methods would be necessary. An aggressive radio and television campaign was selected to introduce potential employees to the 9-1-1 career opportunity. Once the initial obstacle of agencies working together was overcome, several others had to be tackled.

Funding was a concern from the beginning. A fair cost-sharing system had to be established. Agencies were reluctant to allocate dollars to an unproven program. Since this type of 9-1-1 joint recruiting had not been done previously in the Kansas City area, there was no evidence that it would work.

Another obstacle was agreement on a joint application form and recruiting materials among the Human Resource departments at each participating agency. Task forces were established for each area of the campaign. One task force worked on the recruiting materials, another worked on the application materials and a third worked on the orientation process.

The radio advertisements began running on three of Kansas City's most popular stations. In addition, local television stations were very interested in the "story" and provided a tremendous amount of publicity through local news shows at various times throughout the first week of the campaign.

Individuals interested in receiving an application packet were directed to call a regional 9-1-1 Career Line. The task force hoped to receive approximately 300 calls over the entire length of the