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## Dispatch supervisor explains proper 911 call etiquette

By Nick Marnell



Orinda Rotarians honor first responders at the Nov. 29 luncheon. Photo Andy Scheck

The Rotary Club motto is succinct: Service above self. At its Nov. 29 luncheon at the Orinda Community Center, the Rotary Club of Orinda honored a group that lives that motto each and every day: the first responders of the Orinda Police Department and the Moraga-Orinda Fire District.

Orinda Chief of Police Mark Nagel deflected praise to the dispatchers of the county sheriff's office and the fire district. "They are the true first responders," said Nagel, who turned the program over to Erinn Riley, supervising dispatcher for the Office of the Sheriff.

Riley ran down the procedures for making a competent 911 call. "Make sure when you call there is an emergency in progress, like a fight, or a suspicious person walking around," Riley said. "Do not call us with a report of an abandoned car, or for directions on how to cook a turkey, or how to do your math homework."

The more specific you can be, the better, Riley said. Supply a landmark, or a cross street. Describe the suspect and the vehicle. Relay information on any weapons. And do not get frustrated with the questions the dispatchers ask.

"Please do not confuse our directness with rudeness," Riley said. "Safety is first. We ask questions very quickly, and we do not have time to listen to long explanations." The dispatch center is a highly intense, multitasking environment, with information being relayed to officers as operators speak to the caller.

Should you accidentally dial 911 on a cell phone or from a land line, Riley cautioned to stay on the line. If you hang up, dispatch will call back to confirm, and if there is no answer, dispatch must send a responder, which unnecessarily ties up resources.

Ten dispatchers are on duty at any one time, and they work over four radio channels. "Our goal is to answer 90 percent of our calls within 10 seconds," Riley said. Dispatchers can handle calls in 20 foreign languages; those calls are transferred to the appropriate linguist.

At the end of the luncheon, Riley made an announcement that many have felt was long overdue. "Texting to 911 is coming in nine months," she said.

Fire and emergency medical calls from Moraga and Orinda are forwarded from the sheriff's office to the dispatch center of the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District, with whom MOFD subcontracts its dispatch service.

Reach the reporter at: [nick@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:nick@lamorindaweekly.com)

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