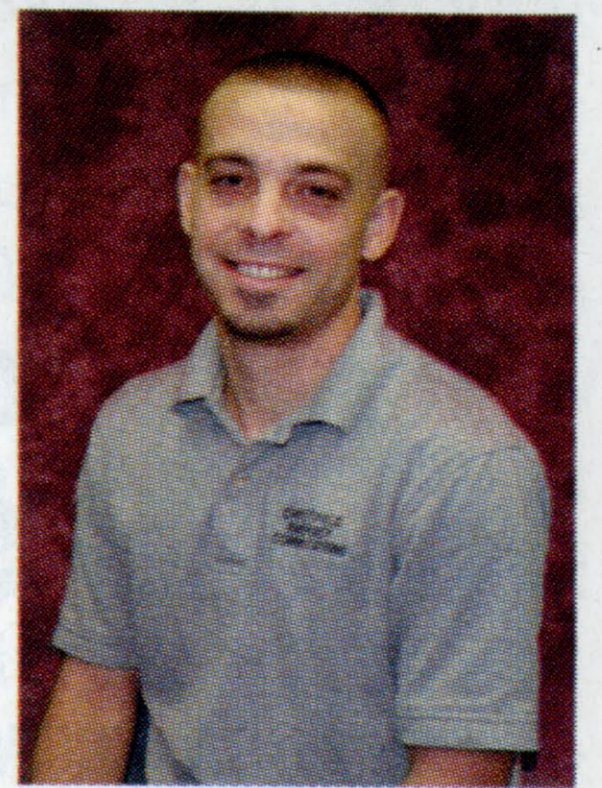




Stay Focused

Robert Paolini "Paol" Balducci Finds Ways to Improve the System



BY MICHAEL BANKS, RPL

Inspired by his father's 34-year career in law enforcement and a desire to enter a career that offers stable employment, Robert Paolini "Paol" Balducci was drawn in to serve as a telecommunicator with Chesterfield County (Va.) Emergency Communications.

Born and raised in Chesterfield County, Va., Balducci attended Longwood University in Farmville, Va., where he earned a BA/BS in business management with a concentration in accounting.

Balducci began working for Chesterfield County on Jan. 15, 2008. "My father has worked in law enforcement for the last 34 years, and I have always had the utmost respect and admiration for people in this profession," he says. As a new communicator, Balducci was taught, "You should treat every first responder and police officer in the same fashion you would if it [were] your father responding."

The Chesterfield County Emergency Communications center covers an area of 437 square miles and serves a population of 322,338 people. With a staff of 79, it dispatches all of the police, sheriff's deputies, fire, EMS, and animal control responders that serve there.

The Chesterfield County Emergency Communications center managers employ an enterprising approach to telecommunicator training. According to Balducci, "Each shift (days, evenings and midnights) is broken up into three slots. As these slots rotate, we have continuous classroom training every Thursday, resulting in each slot receiving eight hours of training over the three-week cycle." This training cycle allows telecommunicators to stay current on technologies and implementation of new tools, maintain required certifications and discuss policies.

One of the duties the staff of

Chesterfield County Emergency Communications takes on is handling after-hours calls to the Crime Solvers Inc. tip line.

In the past, telecommunicators wrote down all tips to forward to the Crime Stoppers office. In 2012, Balducci implemented a new Crime Stoppers template on a laptop that could be used to take down tips. "Since we 'type for a living,' this would enable us to be more productive and efficient than handwriting each and every tip," Balducci says. This process allows telecommunicators to take down the information and remotely print it to the Crime Stoppers office—making the process more efficient. The form has been such a hit that is even being used within the Crime Stoppers office.

In 2010, Balducci was given the award of "Life Saver" for providing lifesaving CPR instructions to a citizen. In 2011, he was recognized as Emergency Communications Employee of the Year. "It is very rewarding to be recognized by your family, friends and co-workers, [and] also be noticed and appreciated by those whose lives you affect," Balducci says.

Balducci was promoted to assistant supervisor in February 2012. With a little over a year under his belt as a supervisor, he has this to offer: "Take everything in. Use every new experience as a learning tool and continue to develop your skills. Nothing learned equals nothing gained." In addition, Balducci says, "Many more things are required of you as a supervisor, and you must be able to handle these as well as all prior responsibilities with which you are tasked. Like the supervisor who trained me when I was promoted said, 'You have to stay focused.'"

With all the rigors of our demanding profession, how has Balducci stayed in

the field? "I know that everyone has their vices, as I have mine, but I try to eat right and exercise often. I run multiple times a week, follow different workouts and relax when I can," he says. "You can't take every bad call or incident home with you; you have to be able to separate your personal life from your work environment. Find a productive hobby to take up in your spare time. Find one that gives you a sense of fulfillment and makes you happy."

Balducci identifies a need for change in the way professionals in our industry are recognized. "You see footage of the responding personnel and what they accomplish, but the question should be posed: 'Would it have turned out differently if the dispatcher had not properly done their job?' On the other hand, "when a dispatcher messes something up or causes harm, it is national news for several days," Balducci says. He feels that credit should be given where credit is due. "We are that initial contact and responsible for linking up first responders with citizens of our respective communities. Without us, would 9-1-1 even exist?" he asks.

When it comes time for him to retire, Balducci would consider a second career conducting training for or managing a comm center. Ideally, he'd like to move to Italy and grow his own grapes on the Mediterranean.

What would he remember most about work once he retires? All the crazy calls.

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