



How Far We've Come Major Leaps in Technology & Training

~ BY GIGI SMITH

What were you doing on September 9th, 1949? I can bet that many of you reading this (including myself) were still just a twinkle in the sky, but I can tell you what John H. Atkinson of the Northern California chapter was doing: he was becoming a member of APCO! At 86 years young, Atkinson has been a member of APCO for 64 years. Think of all the changes you've seen so far in your career with public safety communications—think of all the changes you've seen in the last six months! If you're anything like most people I've worked with, that's exactly what you think and talk about on those long graveyard shifts. You know, sitting around telling the “new kids” what it was like to be a dispatcher years ago. No, it wasn't as bad as having to walk to work uphill both ways, but we certainly didn't have what they have today.

We didn't have computer-aided dispatch (CAD). We wrote everything down

“We didn't have online vehicle registration, we had microfiche”

on cards. We punched the clock to timestamp them and pulled case numbers from a hand-written list. We didn't have online wants and warrants records. We had a giant book that a deputy would get from the courthouse once a week. If we arrested a suspect, we'd use a highlighter to mark their name in that giant book. We didn't have online motor vehicle registrations that could almost display before the officer even advised of the last digit. We had microfiche. Oy.

So imagine the changes that Atkinson



Technology and training go hand-in-hand during sessions at APCO's annual conference & expo. For details on this year's training opportunities, visit www.apco2014.org.

has seen, from his early days as a dispatcher to working his way up to director, to building state-of-the-art communications centers—five in total. Speaking of state-of-the-art, I recall some wishful conversations about future technology and being positive that those “Star Trek ideas” would never happen. Boy, was I wrong.

I also think back on how training has changed over the years. In my case, I was

introduced to the person whom I was to sit with and shown which buttons to push, how to answer the phone, how to place a call on hold and what to do with my handwritten logs at the end of the night. Presto! Congratulations! I was a dispatcher. Then I became a supervisor, after attending the school of hard knocks and learning to be in charge by default as the one with the most seniority on my shift. I didn't attend any formal academy. My only certification was for CPR, and leadership classes weren't even heard of

yet. Nowadays, not only do we have formal academies and numerous certifications, we have leadership programs and, just as important, we have each other.

We've had a number of great training programs develop alongside the new technology that's available. I love the fact that when I need advice or information for my center, I am able to almost instantaneously reach out and confer with a colleague. Just the other day I was talking with someone about APCO's leadership programs and technology. He shared with me that just after he signed up for APCO's

Registered Public-Safety Leader (RPL) program, he logged on to PSConnect to announce he was taking the course and connect with others. He had such positive and complimentary things to say about the first person who responded to him. Someone who had recently dealt with a major (and newsworthy) event took the time to wish him the best and offer her assistance. Could that have happened in 1949? Maybe by other avenues, but definitely not in the manner or time frame that's now possible with modern technology and the support group of the APCO family. We have definitely come along way.

So enjoy thinking back and telling those stories of dispatching long ago. Before you know it, today will be the olden days and our future generations will wonder how we ever did it. **||PSC||**



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