

911 centers struggle to find cell phone callers; Slow results can prove deadly

A late December report from Jonathan Serrie at FoxNews.com illustrates why much-used cell phones are a poor—even deadly—alternative compared to land lines when notifying 911 in an emergency situation.

While commercial applications such as Facebook and Uber can pinpoint a caller's exact location using the caller's built-in GPS in their smartphone, that's not necessarily the case when a call is placed to 911.

That's because most 911 centers determine a mobile caller's location based on technology that was adopted two decades ago at a time before cell phones were equipped with GPS. So, instead of obtaining location information directly from the phone, the 911 center estimates the caller's location based on which cell tower is in use.

MIS-LOCATED The problem is, the tower your phone pings may be miles away, or even in another jurisdiction.

Such was the case back

in 2014, when newspaper delivery woman Shanell Anderson called 911 after accidentally driving her SUV into a pond.

The sinking vehicle was located in Cherokee County—north of Atlanta. But the call was routed to a 911 center in the City of Alpharetta, two counties away. By the time rescuers were able to find Anderson's location, the 31-year old had already suffered critical injuries and died in the hospital several days later.

Alpharetta 911 receives approximately 44,000 emergency calls per year. Each day, the center has to transfer 10-12 calls misrouted from different jurisdictions.

"The amount of time that is spent in that 911 center getting to the right location is time wasted getting responders to the scene," says Alpharetta's Public Safety Administrator Carl Hall.

Alpharetta and other municipalities have been helping tech startup LaaSer test technology to give 911

centers accurate information on the location of mobile callers. No upgrades of equipment or software at the 911 centers are involved, but the technology helps cell phones communicate their GPS locations during emergency calls.

LaaSer CEO Fred White says the approach is to let each piece of the puzzle perform the function it's good at.

"The cell tower is great at communicating voice and data, but not so great at figuring out where your phone is.

"Your phone is very good at telling where it is. So we let the phone do its work, it tells our system where it is. And our system uses the cellular network just to transmit the voice and data necessary to complete the call."

During a supervised test a Fox News reporter dialed 911 from his cell phone. Although he placed the call while standing next to a 911 operator in the Alpharetta center, her

(See **STRUGGLE**, Page 2)



PAGE 1
911 OPERATORS
STRUGGLE TO LOCATE
CELLULAR CALLERS

PAGE 2
SCHOLARSHIP
APPLICATION
PERIOD OPEN
CUSTOMIZED
TELEPHONE SYSTEMS
ARE OFFERED

Draft payment discount

WT Services Friona/Bovina customers can get a one percent discount by paying their bill by bank draft.

Customers who authorize draft payment agree to have their bank account drafted for the amount of their outstanding balance on their account with WT Services. Drafts will occur between the 20th and 23rd of each month.

To arrange for payment of your WT Services bill via bank draft and net the one percent savings, contact the WT Services office in Friona at 1010 Columbia to obtain the necessary authorization form that includes bank routing and account information.



Application period open now

WTS Scholarship program marking fourth year

WT Services is marking its fourth year in 2017 of awarding scholarships to graduating seniors from Hereford, Friona, Bovina, and Bushland high schools. Recipients will be announced in May. Application forms are available from counselors at Hereford, Friona, Bovina, and Bushland high schools.

Applications and rules may be picked up at the WT Services office in Friona at 1010 Columbia, and in Hereford at the WT Services office at 119 East 4th. Application forms may also be downloaded from the WTS website at wtservices.net.

Scholarships are open only to students whose parents or guardians are WT Services customers, or, to students who are WT Services customers themselves. Applicants must be high school seniors who are candidates for graduation this spring.

Scholarship monies will be disbursed in increments per semester.

An official application form, accompanied by two letters of recommendation, and a wallet-size photo must be submitted. One of the letters of recommendation must be from a teacher, principal, or counselor from the high school that the applicant is currently attending.

To be considered, applications must be fully completed, legibly typed or written, have no attachments other than the photo and two required letters of recommendation, and must be received at the offices of WT Services, Inc. P.O. Box 1776, Hereford, Texas 79045, **no later than April 7, 2017.**

Applicants may be asked to attend an interview at

the discretion of the board of parent company West Texas Rural Telephone Cooperative.

Mechanics of the scholarships include the following:

* WT SERVICES scholarships may be used at any state or church-sponsored college or university, or at any accredited vocational or technical school.

* Recipients must maintain a minimum of twelve

credited hours throughout each semester, or have full-time student status at vocational or trade schools.

* Upon enrollment or pre-enrollment for the fall semester, recipients must send WT SERVICES a confirmation from the registrar's office. Should a recipient drop out of school for any reason, the unused portion of the scholarship will be rescinded.

Struggling to locate 911 callers on cell phones...story continued from Page 1

computer screen showed the address of a cell phone tower over a mile away.

When CEO White called from the same location using a LAASer 911 equipped mobile phone, the operator's computer immediately showed the correct address of the 911 center.

LaaSer is working with a major Android manufacturer to make the improved technology standard on their new phones.

Currently, 70 to 80 percent of emergency calls are made on cell phones.

The FCC estimates that a one minute improvement in 911 response times for mobile callers could save

10,000 lives yearly.

The FCC has mandated that by 2021, 911 centers must be able to receive accurate locations from 80

percent of wireless calls. But, that still means that one in five mobile carriers may fall through the cracks in an emergency.

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Telephone systems customized to your needs are available from WT Services.

Systems can be designed for your unique business and office needs.

A representative from WT Services will visit your location to determine needs, including multi-line service, paging, call waiting or forwarding, determine what equipment would best serve those needs,

write a proposal, and arrange for installation by WT Services team members once a plan receives customer approval.

WT Services is experienced in providing telephone systems for business offices, school systems and government offices, among other applications.

Contact Doug Baker at WT Services, 364-7311, to discuss your phone system needs.