

# Communication officers recognized during special week

*Editor's note: The following article was written by Marlene Pfeifer, chief communications officer with the Colby Police Department. In recognition of National Telecommunications Week, Pfeifer agreed to provide brief biographies of herself and the other five people who are assist the public 24 hours a day, seven days a week.*

Each year, the second full week of April is dedicated to the men and women who serve as public safety telecommunications.

Last week was set aside to thank the communications officers of Colby Police Department for their efforts to assist the Thomas County citizens in their time of need.

The communications center is composed of five full-time communications officers and one records clerk.

We have one dispatcher on each shift to answer phones, assist officers with information, page EMS personnel, take initial fire calls, and help people who walk into the Law Enforcement Center needing assistance.

When there is a crisis, whether it is weather or crime related, off-duty dispatchers come to the aid of their co-worker helping where it's needed to keep a calm flow of information to those on the street.

We have been short handed for over a year, and I want to thank my co-workers for working overtime shifts, extended shifts and whatever else was needed to fill our 24/7 schedule.

Thank you to the police officers that have pitched in to help make sure someone is always here.

I would also like to thank our families and friends who understand when we have to miss a meal or a school, family or church function because the schedule was changed at the last minute.

Many technological advances in the dispatch office were seen in 2005.

We have new phone equipment and a new recording system.

We also have a new Computer Aided Dispatch system that ties into most of the equipment except for the state computer and we are still working with the new mapping software which will locate callers and pin-point the address we send officers and emergency personnel to.

At this time, Altel is the only cell phone company that has done any Phase I and II testing which locates 911 callers with global positioning system chips in their phones. Hopefully soon, the other cell phone companies will get on board.

Even though the Thomas County citizens are familiar with most of us, we do have a couple new voices behind the radio. Here is a brief recap of my communications officers:

## Marlene Pfeifer

I began my career with the Colby Police Department in May 1990.

Starting out as a Communications Officer I, I became Emergency Medical Dispatch certified in 1994 and was promoted to Communications Officer II in 1995, and to Chief Communications Officer in 1998.

Along with work experience, I have two associate degrees from Colby Community College. At the APCO Conference last October, I was presented with the Lt. Col. Carl Gray Memorial Award. This was a very humbling experience for me. To have communications personnel from other agencies recognize my efforts in the communications field was a great honor.

Along with my time behind the radio, I am the terminal agency coordinator for the police department which includes lots of paperwork for KBI and KHP recertifying dispatchers, officers and deputies on NCIC.

Every two years, training new employees, validating NCIC entries, KHP audits, etc., I never seem to find an end to what qualifies under the "and other duties as assigned" clause in my job description.

My time behind the radio cuts back to part-time when we are full-staffed, but we haven't been full-staffed for over a year. I am looking forward to being able to catch up on my other paperwork and other duties and do it all in a 40-hour work week.

I have also been a volunteer emergency medical technician with the Thomas County EMS since 1991.

Much of my off time is spent on ambulance calls, since we are short-handed there also. I do try to save at least one evening a week to spoil my two grandchildren, Trinity and Wesley.

## Keyna Baalman

Keyna Baalman's love for law enforcement initially began with

her degree in police administration from Garden City Community College.

She began her employment with the Colby Police Department in 1994.

Between 1995 and 1991, she was a street officer for the Oakley Police Department and a deputy for Morton County.

In September 1991 she returned to Colby as a dispatcher for the second time.

You will usually hear her on the radio between 11 p.m. and 7 a.m. Baalman received her EMD certification in 1996 and was also promoted to Communications Officer II in 1996.

In 2004, she attended a three-day training on tactical dispatch. If the Mobile Command Post is needed at a scene and Baalman isn't already behind the radio, she's the one that responds.

She not only serves the department as a dispatcher; she also provides tours to young children, shares 911 information to businesses and other county events, fingerprints children for Ident-A-Kid, participates in the Bicycle Rodeo, and stands alongside McGruff the Crime Dog. Baalman also works with emergency management to keep the dispatch section of the Mobile Command Post up to date in the event of an emergency.

She helps Pfeifer keep information up-to-date in the many resource manuals and compiles the monthly

911 statistics so Pfeifer knows how many calls are coming in, if the call is a true emergency a disconnect, transferred to another county, etc. This information, landline verses cell phone calls, is very important when applying for state grant money.

## Darren Touslee

Darren Touslee is usually the 7a.m., to 3 p.m., dispatcher, but works all three shifts as needed. He started with the Colby Police Department in April of 1995 as a Communications Officer I, received his EMD certification in 1996, and was promoted to Communications Officer II in 2000. Touslee has an associates degree from Colby Community College in communications and prior to 1995, worked for many television and radio stations in Colby, Hays, and Salina.

He is normally on the 7a.m. to 3 p.m. shift, but has been very helpful to Pfeifer by working any shift as required to make the schedule work.

Although he doesn't get a chance very often, he is an avid storm chaser and has been a trained National Weather Service advance storm spotter since 1985. Touslee and his wife of 16 years, Jodie, have two children; Elizabeth Rose, 7, and Ryan Keith, 4. During his days off, Touslee enjoys spending time with his family, reading science-fiction novels, playing on his computer and puttering around the house." He is also a dedicated Texas

'No Limit' Poker player.

## Susan McMahan

Records Clerk, Susan McMahan began working for the Colby Police Department in December 2000. She received her EMD certification and an associates degree in psychology from Colby College in 2002. She was trained as part of the Sexual Assault Response Team in 2004. Along with her records duties, McMahan still helps as a dispatcher.

She has also been an EMT since 1999, but due to moving out of city limits, she is no longer an active responder with EMS. McMahan said she would like to find time to finish classes for a bachelor's degree in the future.

## Justin Harms

Justin Harms began dispatching in September. He mainly covers the

3 to 11 p.m. shift. Harms is a native of Colby and graduated from Colby High School. He received his criminal justice degree from Colby Community College. Harms enlisted into the Kansas National Guard after high school and is a nationally certified emergency medical technician. He volunteers many hours with Thomas County EMS. After Justin received his degree from Colby College, he moved to Manhattan where he worked full time for two years at the Riley County EMS.

Baalman worked with Harms on his initial in-house training which lasts around a month. Since then, he attended the Dispatch I class last month at Garden City Community College and will be returning next week for the Dispatch II class. In his

spare time, he enjoys camping and other outside activities with his family and friends. Also in another couple months there will be wedding bells ringing.

## Shelley Pruett

Our newest communications officer, with only one week of training is Shelley Pruett. She has lived in Colby for seven years, and prior to working with us, she was the manager at Conoco Travel Shoppe. Pruett will be in training for about one month before being on her own. She is looking forward to her new career choice. In her spare time, Shelley enjoys being outside and spoiling her seven grandchildren.

Pfeifer again thanked all the communications officers for all they do. They have chosen to make communications more than just a job.

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