

TORRINGTON

LCD celebrating 25 years

By John Fitts
 jfitts@registercitizen.com
 @JFittsLCT on Twitter

TORRINGTON » In late 1989, Daniel Soule worked solo in a small 7-by-10-foot room, taking emergency calls for Litchfield County Dispatch.

Soule and just a handful of others dispatched 2,492 calls from the old Troop L state police barracks the first year of the dispatch center's existence. With referrals, its emergency crews in eight towns responded to 3,844 calls.

In 2014, the center from the 24-by-36-foot dispatch floor with some 40 computers and six stations, dispatched 89,000 calls, with its members representing multiple services in 20 towns. In all, those crews responded to 110,000 calls for service.

Along the way, technological advancements have developed alongside member growth.

"The changes have been drastic," said Soule, who is now executive director at Litchfield County Dispatch. "It's come a long way."

LCD was incorporated in

May 1988, going online Dec. 11, 1989, said Kevin S. Webb, communications manager for the center. For many towns, it represented the first time they had access to 9-1-1 technology. Prior to that, many towns had seven digit numbers to call in the event of an emergency and in some places, that number changed based on the need.

This weekend, LCD will officially celebrate 25 years of service with a post-holiday event for current and past employees.

LCD's first dispatch was to send a North Canaan ambulance crew to a structure fire in that town.

LCD spent about a year in Troop L's old headquarters, moving to the newly built barracks a short time later.

In 2011, the operations moved from Litchfield to the Torrington Fire Headquarters Building on Water Street. Today LCD employs 16 full-time dispatchers, generally using four per shift. During emergency events, as many as eight dispatchers will report to duty, working at six stations. Most towns, with two services as

part of the system, pay \$9.79 per capita. Torrington pays \$14.04, since the city's police force is also use the LCD.

Soule and others at LCD see many advantages to the centralized system that covers many towns in the county and a few outside of it.

Like most areas in Connecticut, most small-town fire and emergency medical services departments are volunteer run and well versed in mutual aid, or helping each other out during an emergency, whether it be medical calls or a structure fire.

Those include a board of directors with representation from each town, common infrastructure, a direct link to state police barracks and importantly, during a call, a common channel and terminology for responders.

"Automatic mutual aid is so commonplace here since all the towns work so well together," said Webb.

Jonathan Barbagallo, second assistant chief and public information officer for the Town of Norfolk Emergency Services, said the LCD is light years ahead of what the town had before its exist-

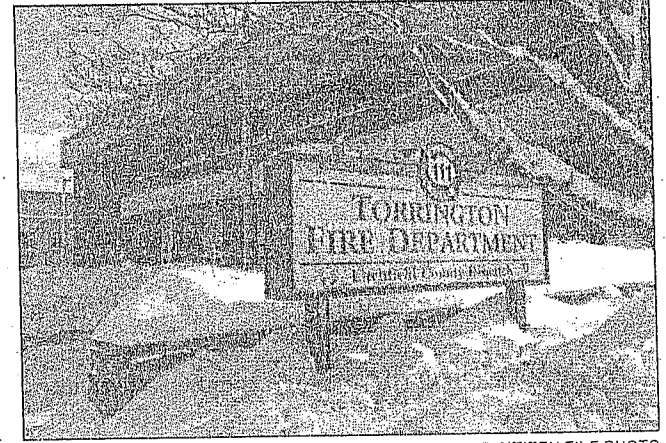
tence. Prior to the 9-1-1 system, Norfolk had two emergency numbers to call, Barbagallo said. Calls for the Norfolk Lions Club Ambulance would go to the Winsted Police Department. Fire calls would be routed to the Falls Village Power Plant, where 24-hour staff would use a radio to "tone out" the fire department.

Barbagallo said there would be someone to take down the information but standardized training and protocols were lacking.

"You can just see how that led to various inefficiencies," Barbagallo. "When you look at the calls and methodologies between then and now, there's just no comparison. It's a quicker and safer model nowadays."

While there is common language and emergency communication, Barbagallo does not feel the towns lose any control of their departments' structures due to the regional dispatch. The regional board helps greatly, he said.

"We're on equal footing on how the center goes," he said. There were certainly is-



REGISTER CITIZEN FILE PHOTO

The Torrington Fire Department headquarters on Water Street, which houses Litchfield County Dispatch.

sues along the way. For some towns that had their own way of doing things, it was an adjustment to move to common ground, Barbagallo said.

"In the early days, that took some getting used to for some departments," he said.

Goshen First Selectman Bob Valentine said LCD does much more than answer phones and log information. If the town's volunteer fire company needs mutual aid from a neighboring department, or Campion Ambulance Service's paramedic, dispatchers will take care of those details, he said.

"That's an invaluable thing to have," Valentine said. "There's a lot of things

that LCD does behind the scenes."

LCD is constantly working to upgrade its systems and improve technology while keeping a budget in mind, Webb said.

Most importantly, the system works, according to Soule.

"I think we proved consolidation does work effectively," Soule said.

Litchfield First Selectman Leo Paul Jr. certainly agrees.

"Litchfield County Dispatch serves its communities in an outstanding manner," he said. "I think they are a model the state should replicate if they're seriously considering regional dispatch centers."

LITCHFIELD

Residents inducted into Sons of American Revolution