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Central Dispatch
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Annual Report for 2021



... From the Director

St Joseph County Central Dispatch continues to improve and grow with the times. The newly installed radio system and replacement of every radio for all Fire and Police agencies within the county is complete. This has greatly improved our ability to have reliable and clear communications with every department within our county. It has also given us the flexibility to directly communicate with our surrounding counties and even have the ability for state-wide communications.

After our system went operational in mid-2020, we had discovered a few centralized locations within our county where communication still was difficult. Mainly in the extreme southwest portion of our county. The solution for this was to construct an additional tower in that area, however the cost was too expensive for one county to handle. Our Board of Commissioners made a challenge to all Department Heads to “Think Outside the Box” for any special projects, due to funding issues.

I approached Cass County, Sheriff and Dispatch Coordinator, knowing that they were having similar issues in the southeastern portion of their county. After nearly a year of negotiations with Cass County and Motorola, a deal was signed to have a Multi-Jurisdictional agreement to construct such a communication tower and share the costs between the two counties. So, we are on our way to solving a very important communication problem for both counties.

Other improvements in equipment and building repairs have taken place to maintain the Center which is now approaching 22 years old.

Our staffing issue remains a problem, we are currently down 3 full-time employees, with one trainee just completing her training. Staffing is not a problem unique to St Joseph County, but a nation-wide issue that every Director I speak with is facing. It is the most talked about or written about topic in any article about 911 Centers.

We continue to take applications, do our testing and interviews, and go through our selection process to pick the best possible candidates.

This is the most frustrating part of my job, I used to take it personally, trying to figure out what I or we are doing wrong, or what could we be doing better? We have made several modifications in our training process, trying to “fit” it to the new applicants learning styles.

Finally, I have decided that this will be my last Annual Report for the St Joseph County Central Dispatch. I have contemplated this decision for a long time, this has not been an easy decision for me.

I have been employed with St Joseph County for over 44 years. I was first hired on as a Road Patrol Deputy with the St Joseph County Sheriff Department. At that time I was one of the youngest deputies that had ever been hired. I went on to become one of the first Accident reconstructionist for our county, and the first DARE Officer for the Sheriff Department, I went into the local schools, and interacted with the students. This was the most enjoyable period time of my career. After 15 years, I was promoted to Road Patrol Sergeant, at which time I had to give up the DARE program. I remained Sergeant for 12 years at which time I retired and took a Supervisor position at Central Dispatch. After 10 years as a Supervisor I was promoted to Director of the Central Dispatch.

St Joseph County became home, where I met my wife, and where we raised our two boys. This county will always hold a special place in my heart. I have greatly enjoyed working with the other department heads and Directors. I have really enjoyed the team approach that County Administrator Teresa Doehring has brought to our county. She has been a fantastic leader and inspiration for this county.

I would like to thank the County Board of Commissioners for the trust and confidence they have placed in me. I have enjoyed our interactions over the years, the guidance and advice you have shared has made my job easier.

Finally, I would like to express my thanks and admiration to my entire staff. We have had some good times and some not as good. The most important thing is we remained a team. The work always came first. The safety of our First responders, Police, Fire and EMS along with the safety and well-being of our citizens has never been compromised.

I will continue to admire all of you, and I wish you well in the future. Remember who you are, why you are here and the important job you perform. Continue to keep the citizens of St Joseph County safe. I am extremely proud to have worked with all of you.

Thank You

Dennis Brandenburg

St Joseph County 911 Policy Board

ST. JOSEPH COUNTY 9-1-1 POLICY BOARD, JANUARY 2021

Chief Scott Boling
Three Rivers Police Department
Representing:
Three Rivers Police Department

Chief Mark Brinkert
Colon Police Department
Representing:
Village Police Departments

Chief Jeffrey Bloomfield
Three Rivers Fire Department
Representing:
Fire Chief's Association

Director Ryan Banaszak
Sturgis Police Department
Representing:
Sturgis Police Department

Sheriff Mark Lillywhite
St. Joseph County Sheriff Office
Representing:
St. Joseph County Sheriff Office

Commissioner Dennis Allen
St. Joseph County Board of Commissioners
Representing:
St. Joseph County Board of Commissioners

First Lieutenant Toby Baker
Michigan State Police
Representing:
Michigan State Police

Brad Selent
Three Rivers Area Hospital
Representing: Emergency Medical Service

Teresa Doehring
St. Joseph County Administrator
Ex-Officio Member

Linda Leensvaart
Citizen at Large

There have been a few changes in the St Joseph County 911 Policy Board in late 2021. Long time members: Lieutenant James Coleman has moved to a new post in Hart Michigan, Chief Tom Bringman retired in mid-November from the Three Rivers Police Department. These gentlemen have been a huge asset to the 911 Board.

This Policy Board oversees the communication and emergency dispatch services for St. Joseph County. This Policy Board assists in the development and implementation of all the projects taken on by Central Dispatch. It is with their support that these projects are presented to the County Board of Commissioners for approval.

The entire board has been great to work with and interact with over my tenure.

St Joseph County Central Dispatch Staff

Stacey Bower	10/17/2007	Kelli Coykendall	10/12/2010
Kyle Murk	08/14/2012	Abe Merten	10/22/2013
Regan Taylor	04/08/2014	Ryan Fillmore	07/07/2015
Andy Homan	10/28/2015	Rachel Gould	02/01/2016
Kory Wallace	10/24/2016	Debra Williams	02/12/2019
Brendon Andaverde	03/12/2019	Abbigail Sweet	11/25/2020
Makenzi Troyer	08/04/2021		
Part-Time	Sabrina Lindsley		02/26/2019

Above is the current staff of Telecommunicators for the St Joseph County Dispatch Center. We currently have 3 full-time openings in the Dispatch Center, which we hope to fill soon.

The 4 Supervisors (shown in red) are some of my most experienced personnel. They manage the day-to-day business of the Center. Some of their responsibilities include, but are definitely NOT limited to; scheduling, maintaining staffing levels, reviewing calls, and handling and troubleshooting equipment and software issues.

They are working supervisors. Which means, they work right alongside the Telecommunicators, answering 911 and non-emergency calls, entering information into the Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) System, dispatch Police, Fire, and EMS to the calls as they come in. These people are the heart of the Dispatch Center, making sure proper procedures are followed, the staff has what they need to do the work, and provide advice and guidance to the other staff members.

Hiring and Training

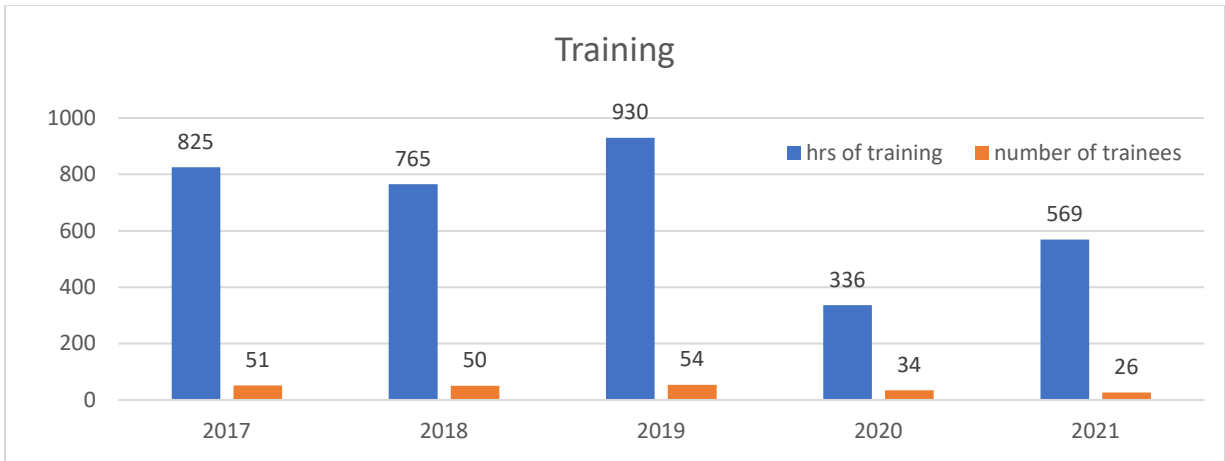
These are 2 of the biggest topics for any Dispatch Center. As I have stated before, we currently have 3 vacant full-time positions. We are hoping to get these positions filled very soon. You can just imagine what a strain it places on the other members of the staff to cover these vacancies. We have been able to modify our scheduling, somewhat to try to alleviate some of this stress, but there are requirements for minimum staffing that we must adhere to provide the level of service to the county.

Hiring and retaining people is our greatest challenge. It's not only ours, but there is a nation-wide shortage of people who want to be or can be Telecommunicators. We are constantly hiring people. We just get a new employee started in their training, only to have them realize that this is not the job for them. We make every attempt to explain the duties and responsibilities of the Telecommunicator. We even have the applicants sit in with the other Telecommunicators during a shift to get a feel for what exactly goes on. Nevertheless, we have people think they can do the job, but once exposed to the demands and importance of the job, they begin to feel that it is overwhelming or just not a good fit.

Training is the other topic that is a continual thing, with the ever-changing technology, various laws, and regulations. Each Telecommunicator is required to attend training to maintain their designation as a Telecommunicator.

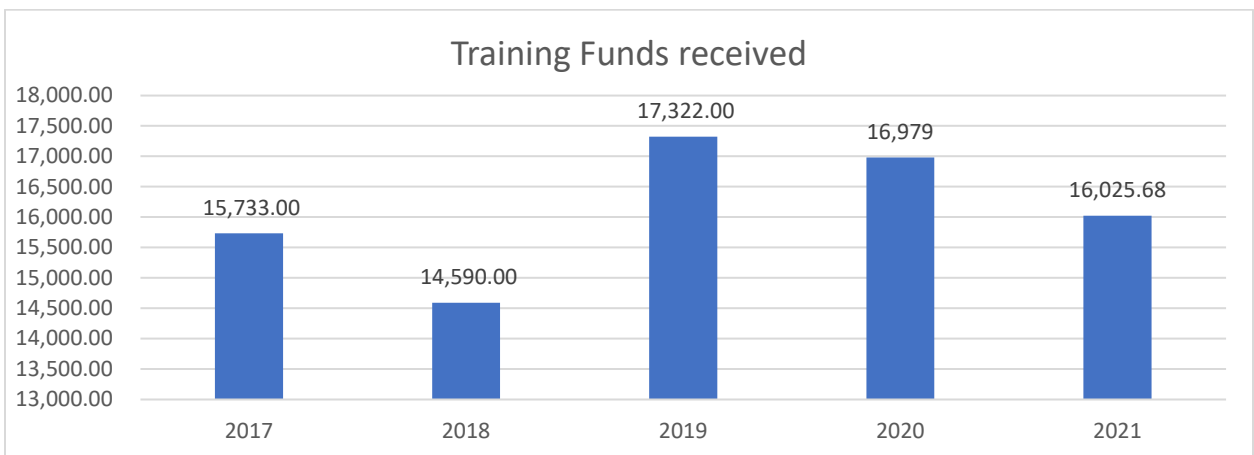
Each Telecommunicator must complete their in-house training on all our systems, policies, and procedures. It is a 6 – 8-month process to accomplish. This prepares them to be able to work on their own. Once completing our in-house training each employee must attend a 40-hour Basic Dispatch training and a 40-hour Advance Dispatch class. These 2 courses are mandated by the State and must be completed to be a designated Telecommunicator.

Once these requirements are completed, each Telecommunicator must attend a minimum of 24 hours continuing education courses every 2 years that have been approved by the State 911 Committee. In the following charts you can see the amount of training our Telecommunicator have received in the past years. At the end of 2021 classes were just beginning to be held in-person, Many classes are still being held virtually to ensure the Telecommunicators retain their designated status.



To achieve the necessary training for each telecommunicator, St Joseph County Central Dispatch receives Training Funds from the State of Michigan. These funds are collected from every telephone that can dial 911 in Michigan. They are then distributed out to each Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP).

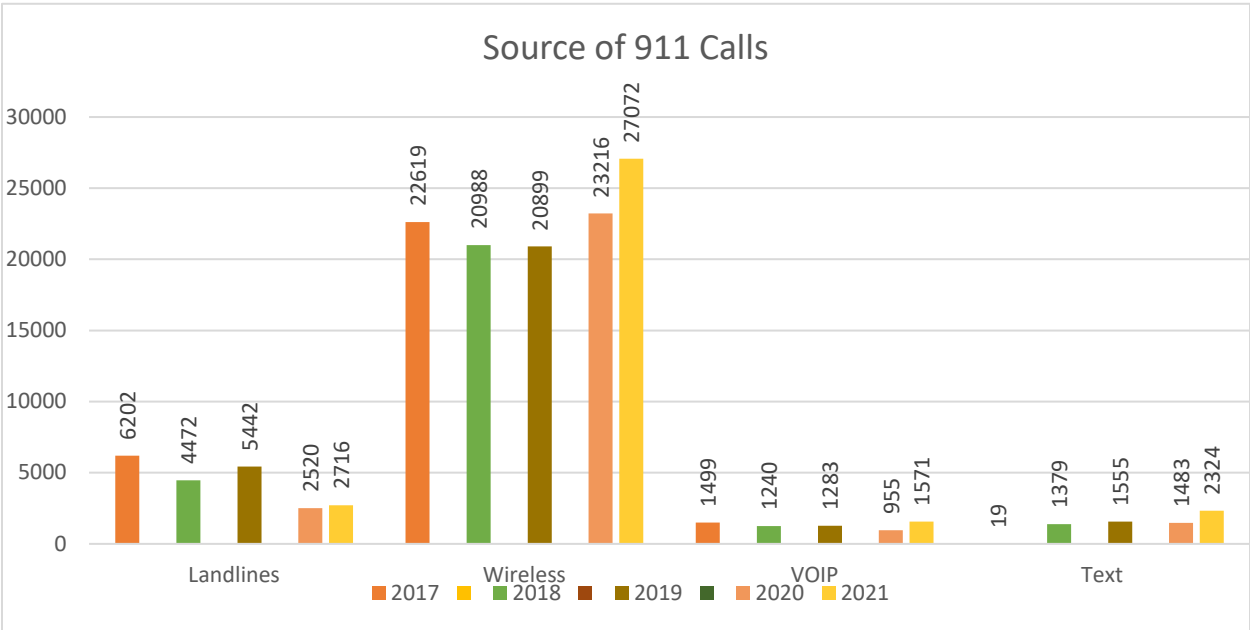
These training funds must be applied for and accurate records kept and reported annually to the State 911 Committee (SNC). Below is a graph showing the amount of funding St Joseph County has received. These funds are exclusively for training and may not be used for any other purpose. Each PSAP has 2 years to use these funds if they are unable to do so the fund must be returned to the State.



Statistics for St Joseph County Central Dispatch

St Joseph County Central Dispatch is the single hub to receive 911 emergency calls for the entire county. These 911 calls come from several sources, Wire Line, or your typical home telephone as you know it. The wireline type of telephone used to be the most used form of reporting to Central Dispatch. With the wide use and continued development of cell phones, the wireless calls have become the most prevalent source of calls into dispatch. These 2 sources are followed by the Voice of Internet Protocol phones, (VOIP typically home phones you get as part of your cable tv package) and the text-to-911 from cell phones.

The graph below illustrates the number of calls from each of these sources. As you can see, the Cell Phones or Wireless phones, dominate the number of calls into dispatch.

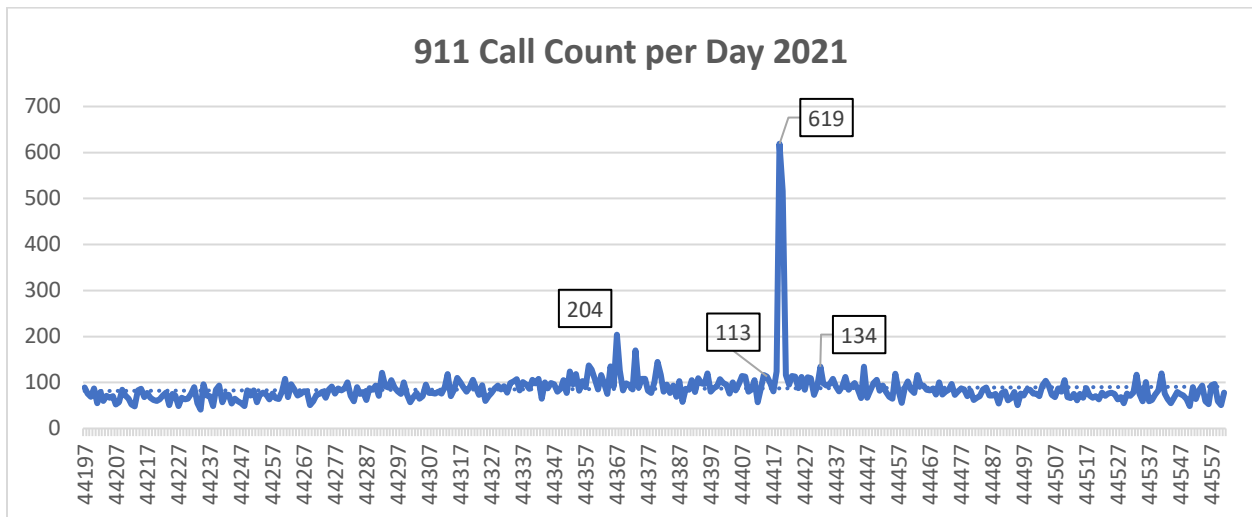


In 2021, the 911 calls into Central Dispatch increased 5,509 calls over 2020 from 28,174 to 33,683. 80% of these calls originated from cell phones.

911 calls are not the only calls received in the Dispatch Center. We also handle the Non-Emergency or administrative calls for various calls for service. Central Dispatch is the main after-hours contact for ALL Police and Fire Departments, Department of Public Works, utility companies, County Road Commission, etc. In 2021 Central Dispatch handled 88,784 in-coming calls and made 22,497 out-bound calls. That is 111,281 non-emergency calls on top of the 33,683 emergency 911 calls received. Central Dispatch received a grand total of 144,964

telephone calls. This results in an average to about 93 911 calls, and 243 non-emergency calls per day.

If you will remember back to the major storms that blew through St Joseph County in August of 2021, resulting in thousands of dollars' worth of damage. The graph below shows just the 911 calls into Dispatch for the entire year. It is obvious when the storms struck, by this graph. Dispatch received over 619 calls to 911 on August 11, 2021

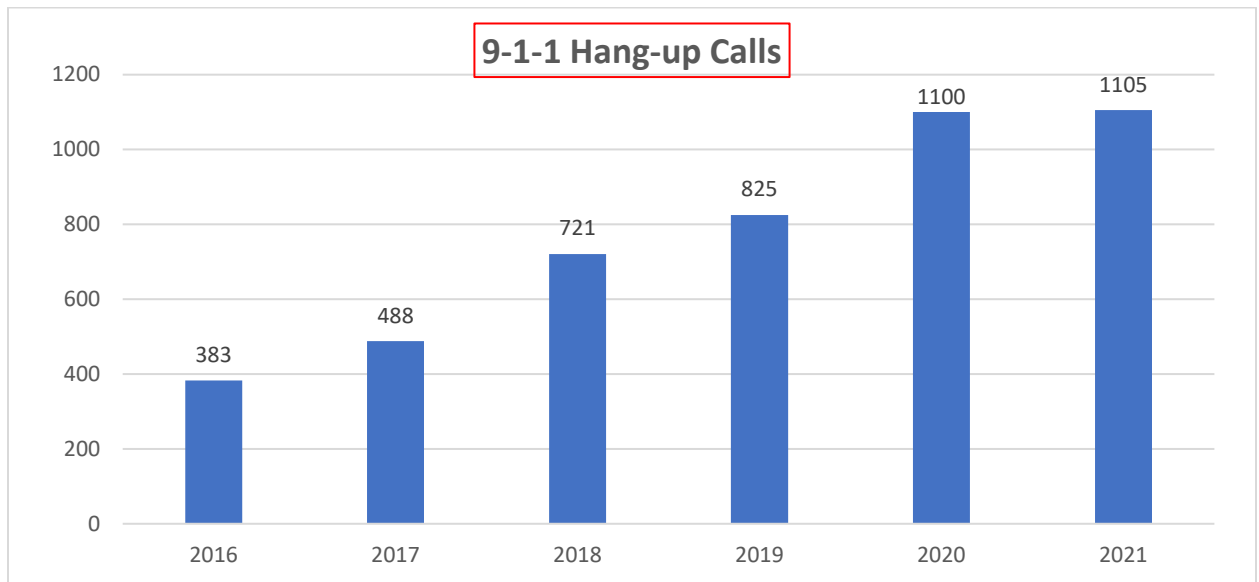


That resulted on over 6 times the number of 911 calls alone, into dispatch in an average day. This storm struck very early in the morning. At that time, we were at minimum staffing with only 2 dispatchers on-duty. You can just imagine what it was like in dispatch that morning. I had gotten up early that morning anticipating the calls. It took over an hour for me to get to work on my normal 20-minute drive. Telecommunicators Regan Taylor and Brendon Andaverde were doing the best that they could under the circumstances. I joined in the call-taking, and it was another 2-hours before Sabrina Lindsley arrived for her shift.

These are the types of days that are difficult to plan for. Each of the telecommunicators performed their duties second to none. I would like to commend each of them for the excellent job they did that day.

9-1-1 Hang-up Calls

Abandoned 911 calls are the problem everywhere and in every dispatch center throughout the nation. These types of calls are commonly referred to a "pocket dials" as they occur when people leave their phone unlocked and carry it in their pocket or purse. Once again, the number of abandoned 911 calls increased in 2021 as in the graph below. It is not a huge increase, but each of these calls must be handled as if they were an actual 911 call.

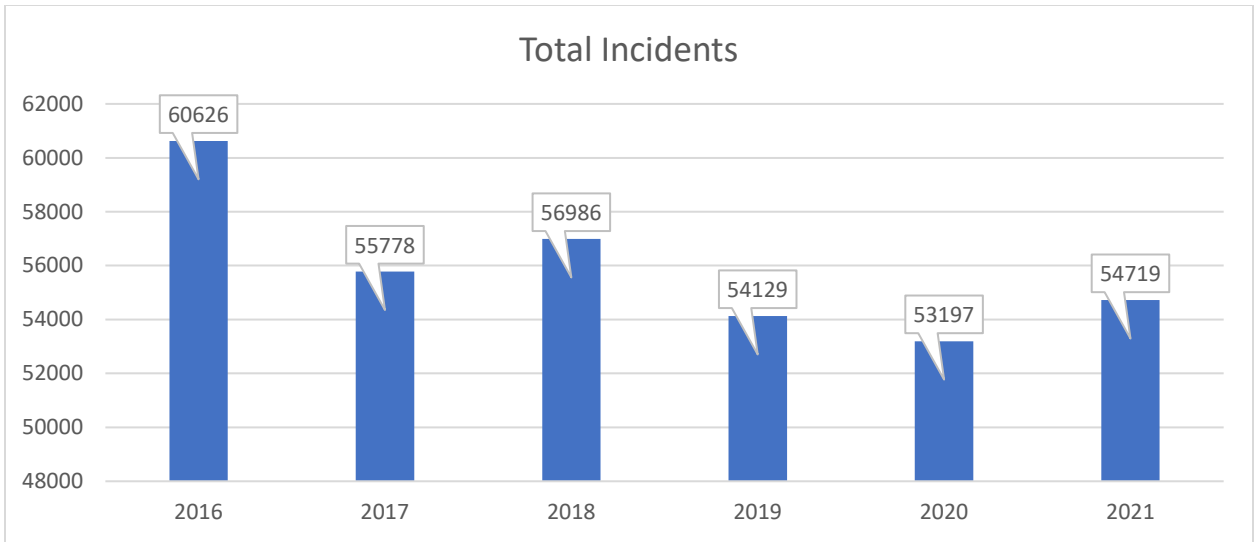


If a caller somehow dials 911 the Telecommunicator must still call that number back or try to contact that person to ensure that it was just a mistake or an actual 911 emergency. It requires time and patience to call the number back, leave a voice mail message and hope to have someone return the call. Dispatch also can send a text message to the phone, many times the person will respond with a text message saying it was a mistake. If dispatch is unable to make any kind of contact, a police officer is sent to the area of the call, if an accurate location is determined, Hopefully they are able to contact someone to see if there was an emergency.

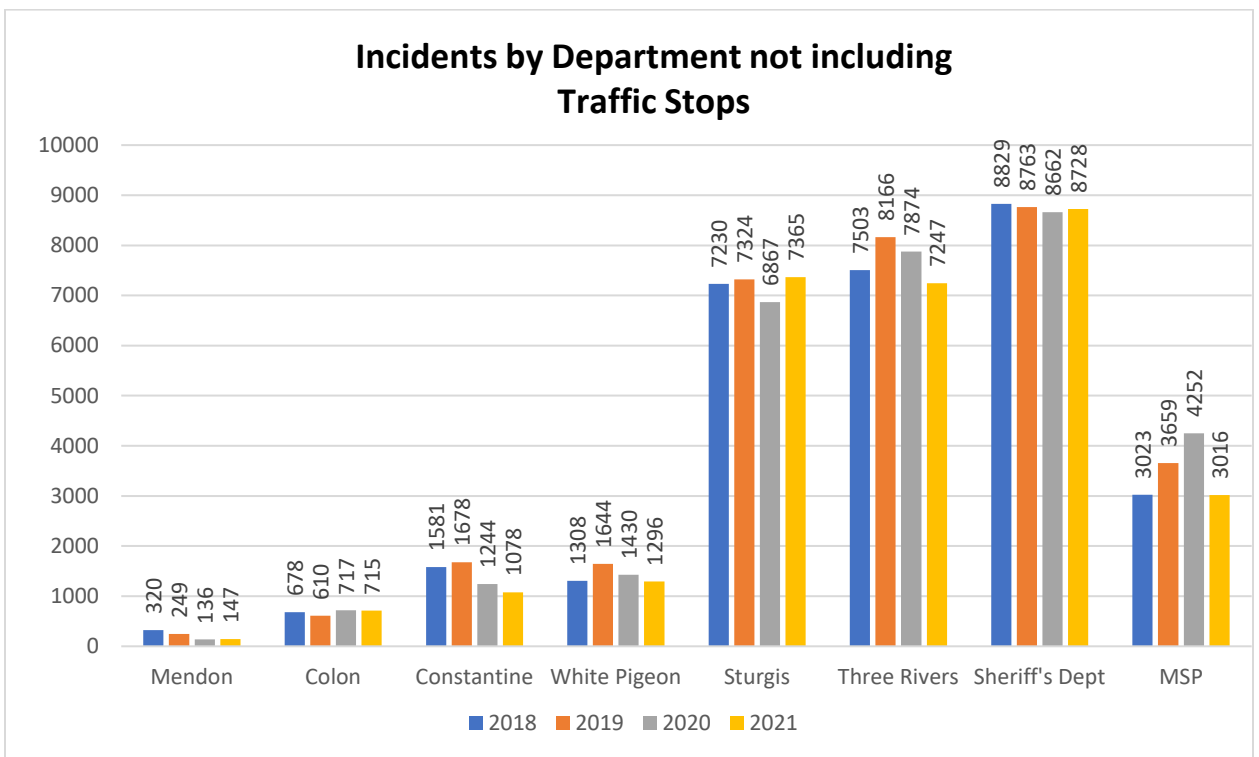
This all takes time and resources, many of which are spread very thin as it is. This is done on every abandoned 911 call to ensure the safety of our citizens.

Total Incident

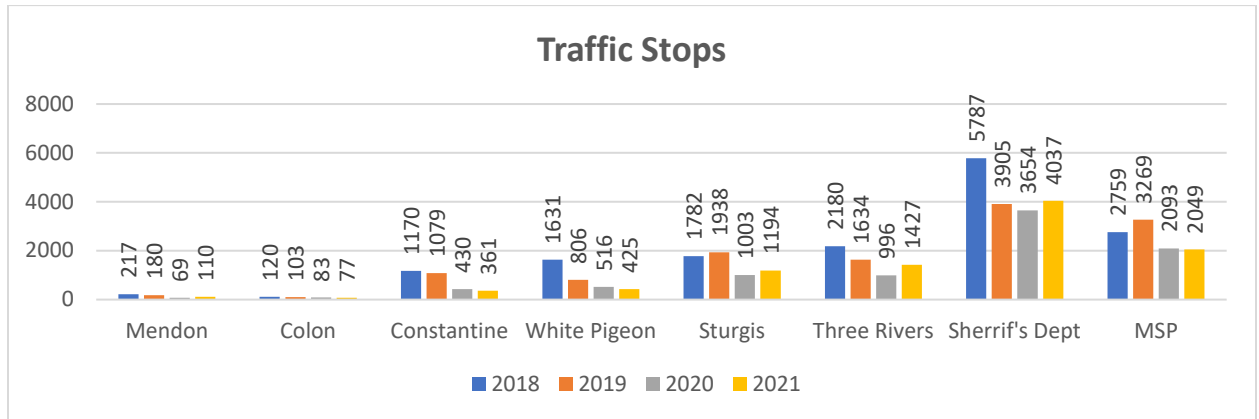
After a couple of years of decline for the number of incidents, 2021 showed a rise of over 1500 incidents throughout St Joseph County, as illustrated below in the next graph. There was a total number of incidents of 54,719 calls for service. This represents ALL incidents within St Joseph County, where a Police Officer, Fire Personnel, or EMS were assigned to a call. We will break this down later in this report.



The following chart is a break-down of number of calls per Police agency within the county, excluding traffic stops. There were slight increases for some of the Police agencies. Sturgis Police, Sheriff Department, and Mendon Police, all showed an increase in their call volume. The other agencies all had a decrease in their calls.



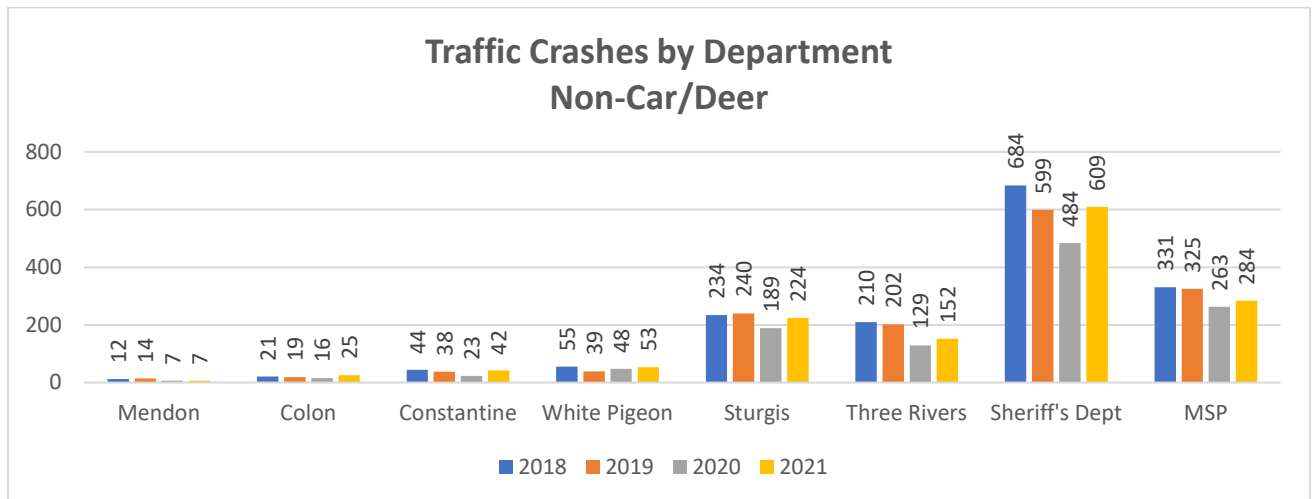
Let's look at how the traffic stops affect the number of calls for each department. Below is a breakdown of the number of traffic stops per department for 2021



There was an increase of 836 traffic stops made in 2021 of 2020 county-wide.

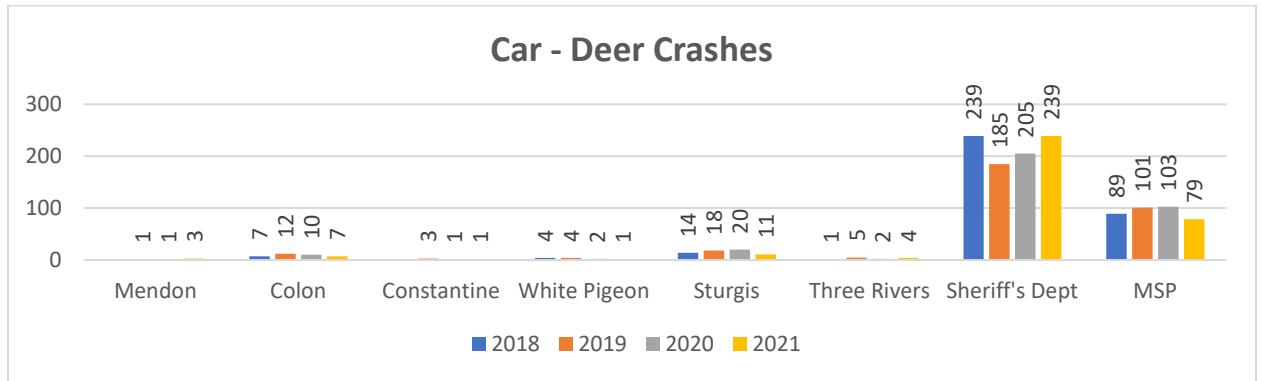
Traffic Crashes

Traffic crashes remain very prevalent in St Joseph County. I have separated them by Car/Deer crashes and Non-Car/Deer crashes displayed in the following 2 charts.

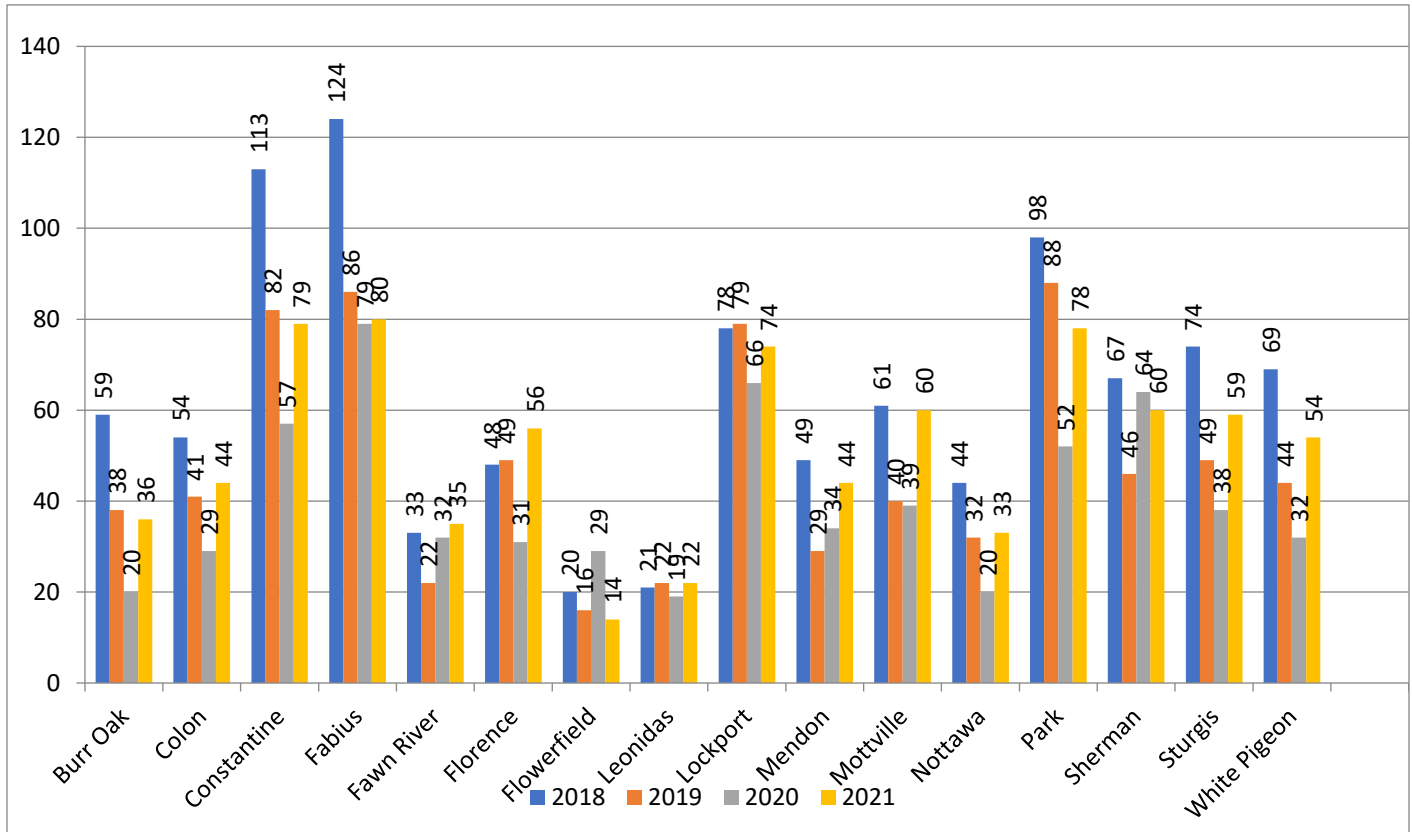


Non- Car/Deer crashes were up 237 incidents in 2021. There was a total of 1396, up from 1159 in 2020.

Car/Deer crashes remained relatively the same from 2020 to 2021 at 344 and 345 respectively. The practice of having drivers make their report directly to the Sheriff Department has helped keep the officers on the street and makes it more convenient for the drivers to make a report. Car/Deer crashes are shown in the chart below.



Crashes throughout the county have been broken down by Township in the following chart



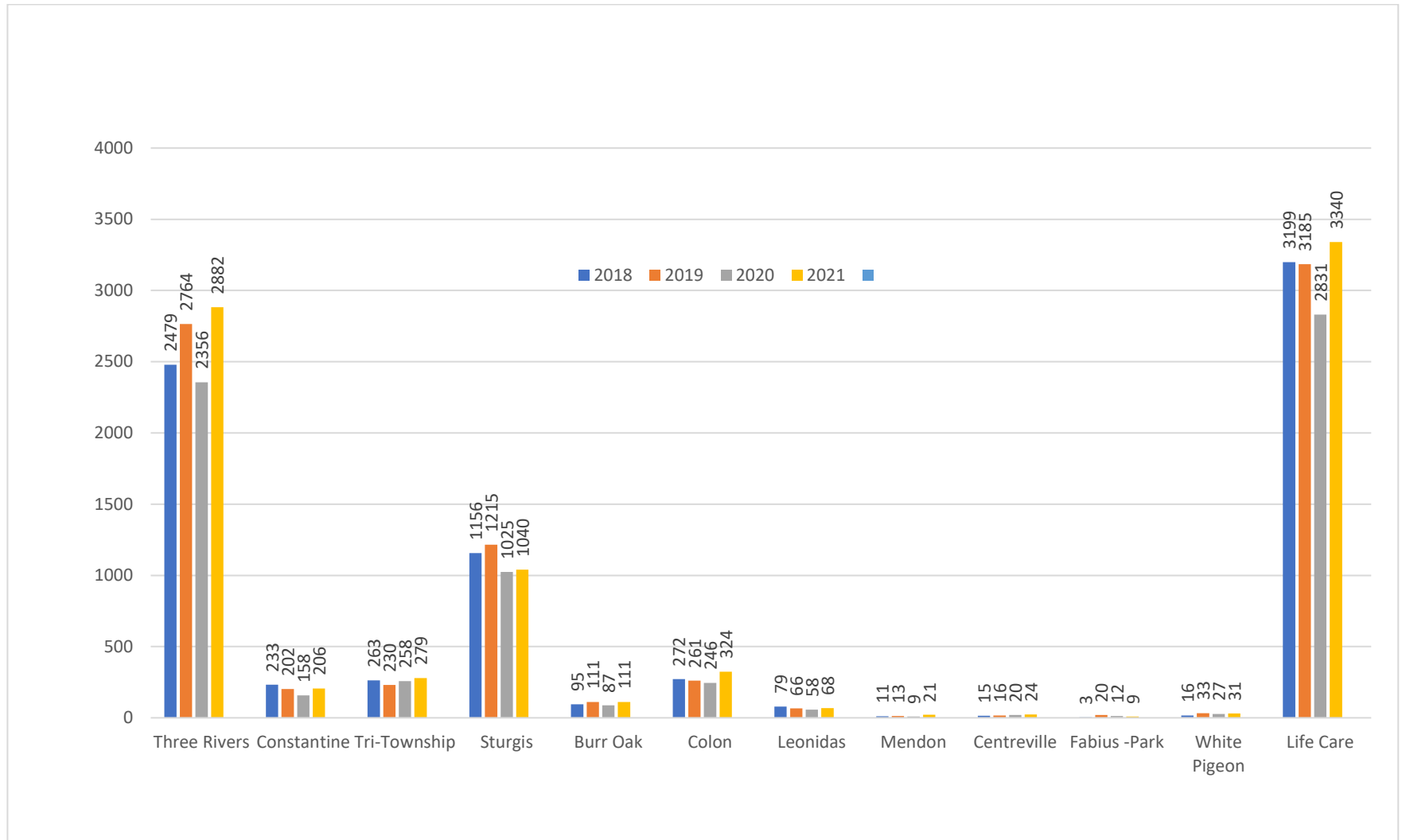
Medical First Responder Calls by Department

Medical calls were up in 2021. There were 1248 more calls this year for a total of 8335 total medical calls in 2021. With staffing levels reaching low levels for most Emergency Medical Services, this has placed a great strain on the emergency responses and increased response times to many calls. The shortage of properly trained EMS staff has resulted in longer waiting periods to get help to the scenes.

In 2021 these services are stretched beyond their limit but they managed to cover the entire county as best as they could. There are 3 ambulance services, and 6 Medical First Responder agencies, working out of the area Fire Departments, that are automatically dispatched to medical calls of various types. Even though the other 4 Fire agencies do not automatically respond, they are often called upon for manpower assist on very serious calls such as cardiac arrests and heart attacks when needed.

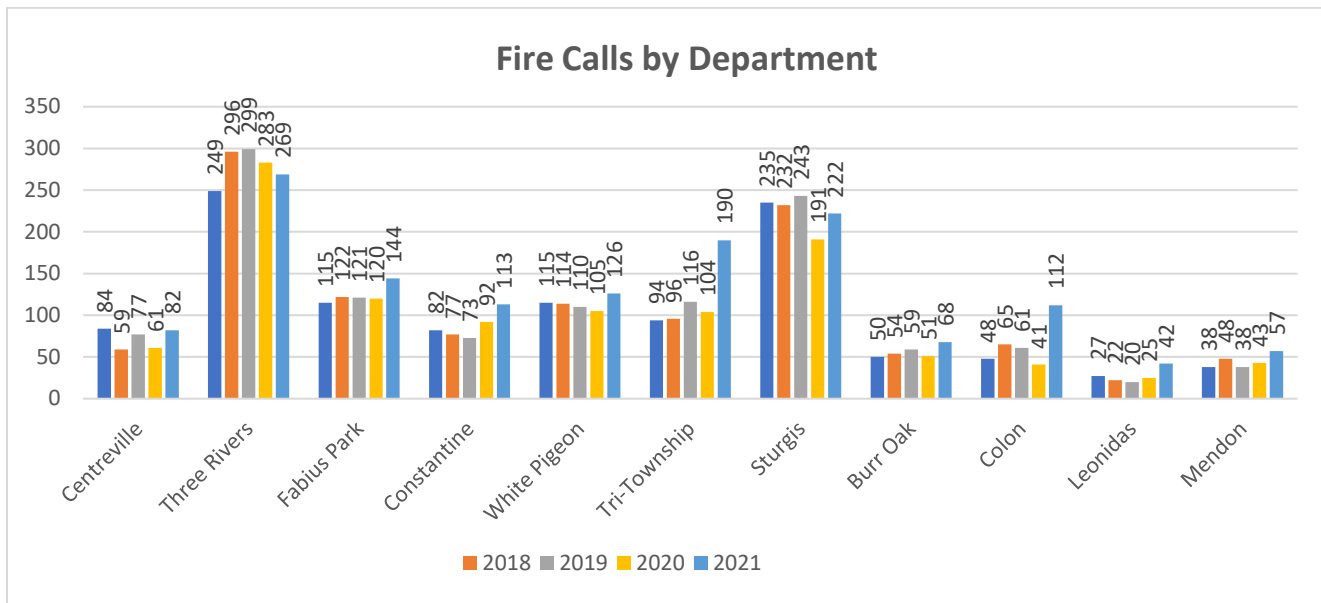
The Chart below shows the number of Medical calls per agency. The chart has been placed in landscape mode for easier viewing. You can see the increase, in medical calls across the board for all agencies but one.

Medical Calls 2021



Fire Calls

The 11 area Fire Departments had their busiest year in 2021. They handled a total of 1425 calls county-wide. This is up 309 calls or nearly 28% from 2020. This has been the busiest year for the past 8 years.

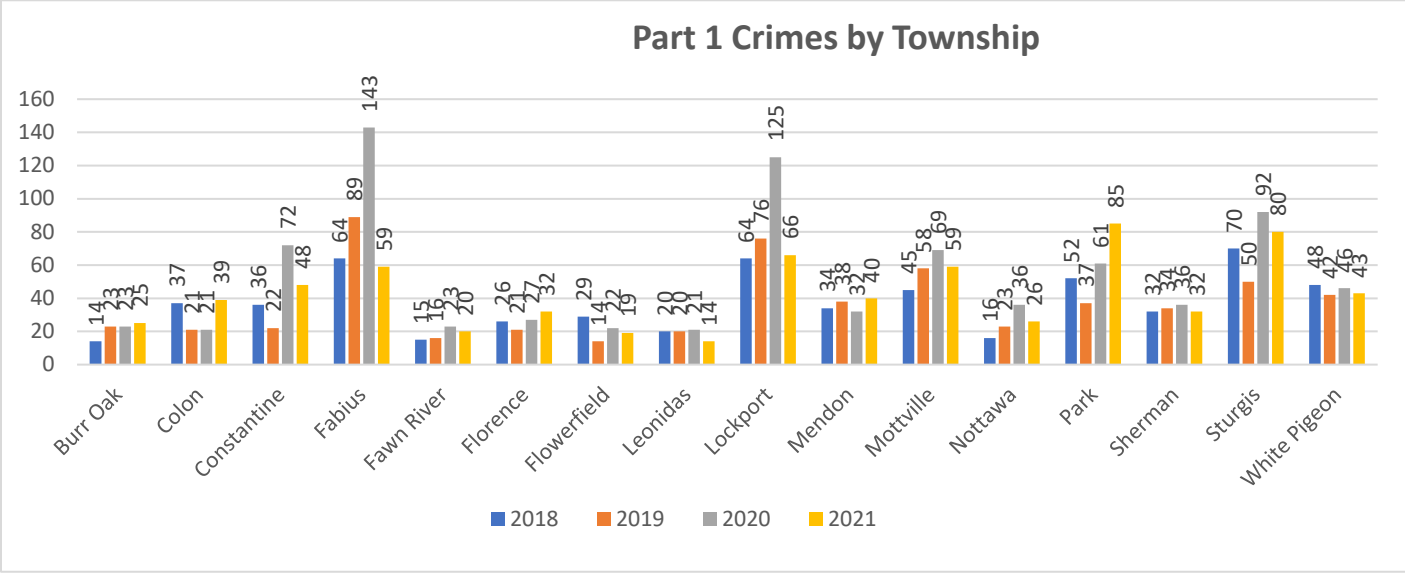
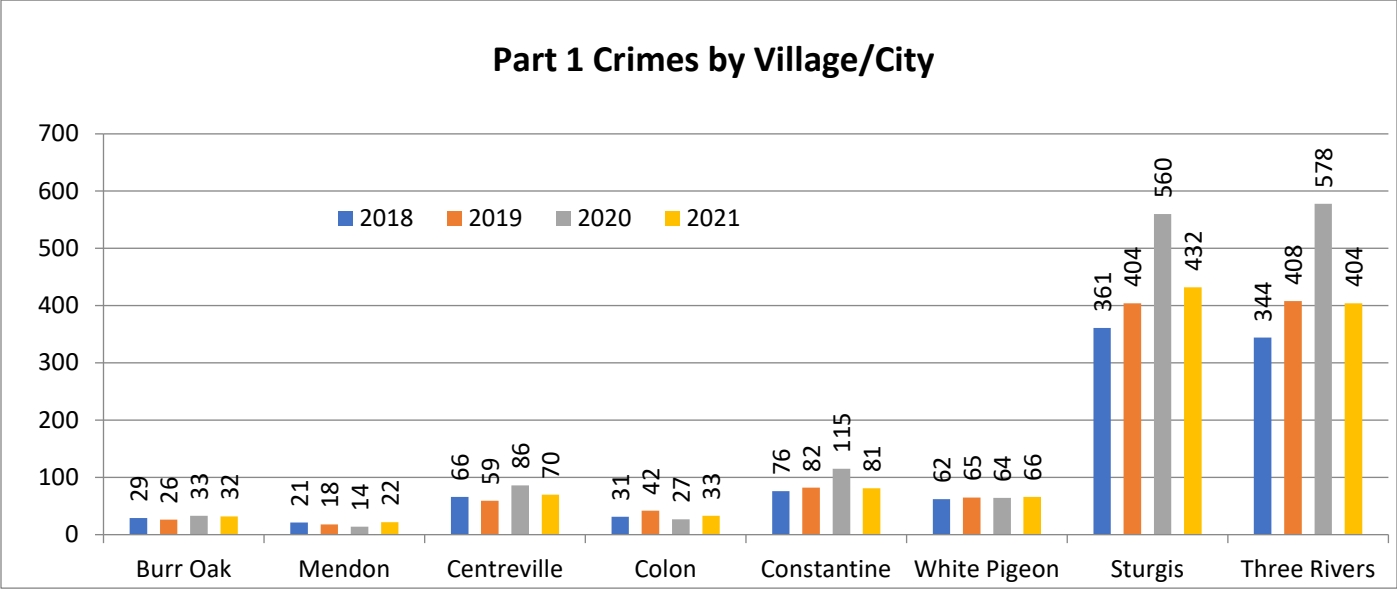


Crime Statistics

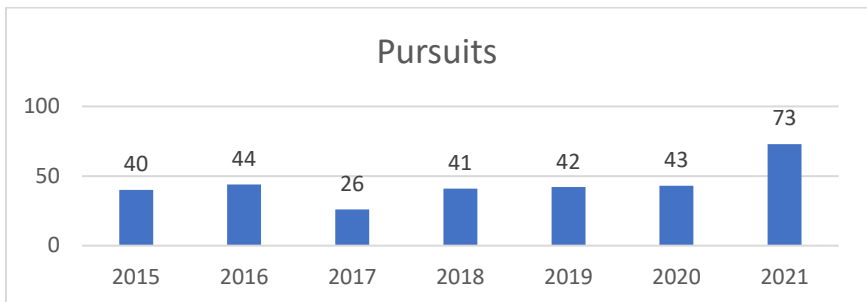
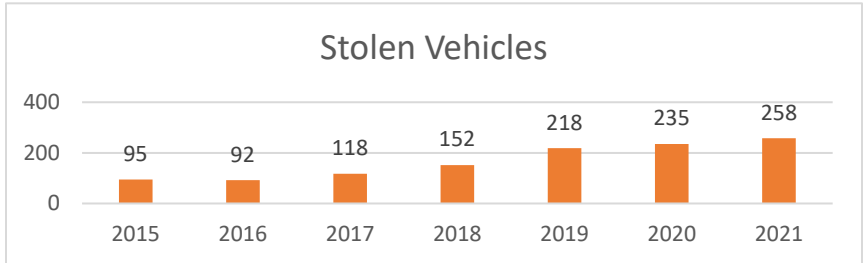
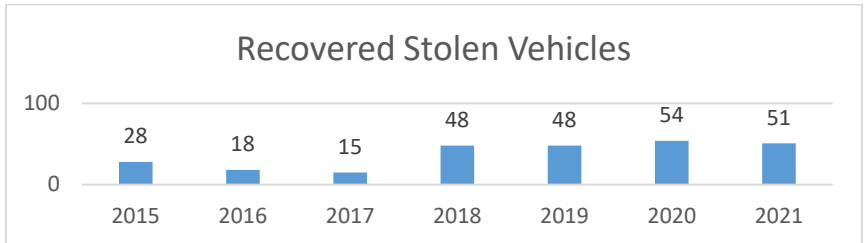
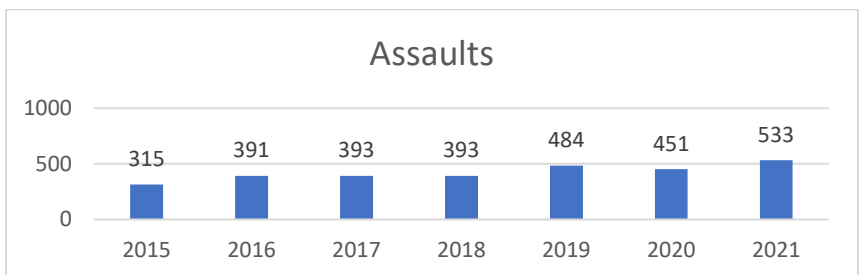
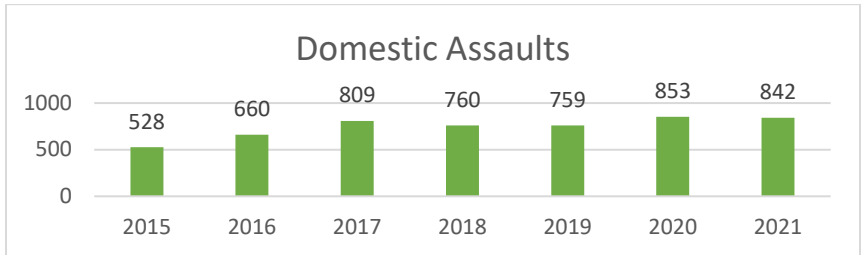
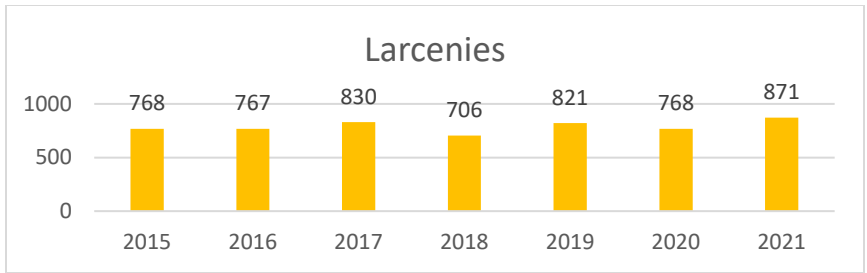
Overall, crime statistics in St Joseph County have had a slight drop from 2020 to 2021. These statistics are based on how the calls are reported to Dispatch during the initial call taking. These may differ from what the actual crime is classified as after the investigation has been completed.

We Begin with Part 1 Crimes. These are Crimes against Persons, such as Homicide, Forcible Rape, Robbery, Aggravated Assault, Burglary, Larceny, Motor Vehicle Theft and Arson. These are the more violent types of crimes. Over the past 8 years, these types of crimes remained at steady numbers. However, in 2020 these numbers made a drastic increase. In 2021 they appear to have returned to their “normal” levels as shown in the following 2 graphs.

The first graph is the statistics for the villages and cities within the county. The following chart is a breakdown for the 16 townships.



A few other statistics and types of calls are in the following 6 graphs. They are depicting specific types of crimes and the trends they have followed over the 7 years. Each graph has the information titled and the total numbers of each crime type



Community Involvement and Contacts

In 2021 we tried to recover and resume our involvement with the community and get out and meet people. However, the uncertainty and inconsistent information continued to hinder many in-person meetings. Our 911 for Kids program was still on hold from 2020 due to the inconsistency of the schools being in session.

We were able to get some people off to in-person training such as, Communication Training Officer, Basic and Advance Dispatch training for newly hired employee, Emerging Technology Forum, Center Manager Certification program and the annual NENA/APCO (National Emergency Number Association / Association of Public-Safety Communications Official) Conference held in Kalamazoo.

These training sessions, meetings, and conferences help to reconnect with other Telecommunicators and Directors that we had not seen in over a year. This helps to restore communications between centers and build a network to rely on and bounce ideas and questions off.

Some of the local meetings were restored, Director Brandenburg attended the regular meetings of the Medical Control, Medical Control Advisory and Professional Standard Review Organization, Local Emergency Planning Council (LEPC), The St Joseph County 911 Policy Board meeting, Fire and Police Chief meetings, Vulnerable Adult meeting, along with meeting with vendors and support staff. Many of these meetings were held virtually, but some were reestablished and met in person.

Closing

I would like to thank you all for your support and trust. I have enjoyed these past 7 years as Director, I feel we have accomplished many things. I again would like to thank my staff and all their efforts over the years. I will miss you and think of you often.