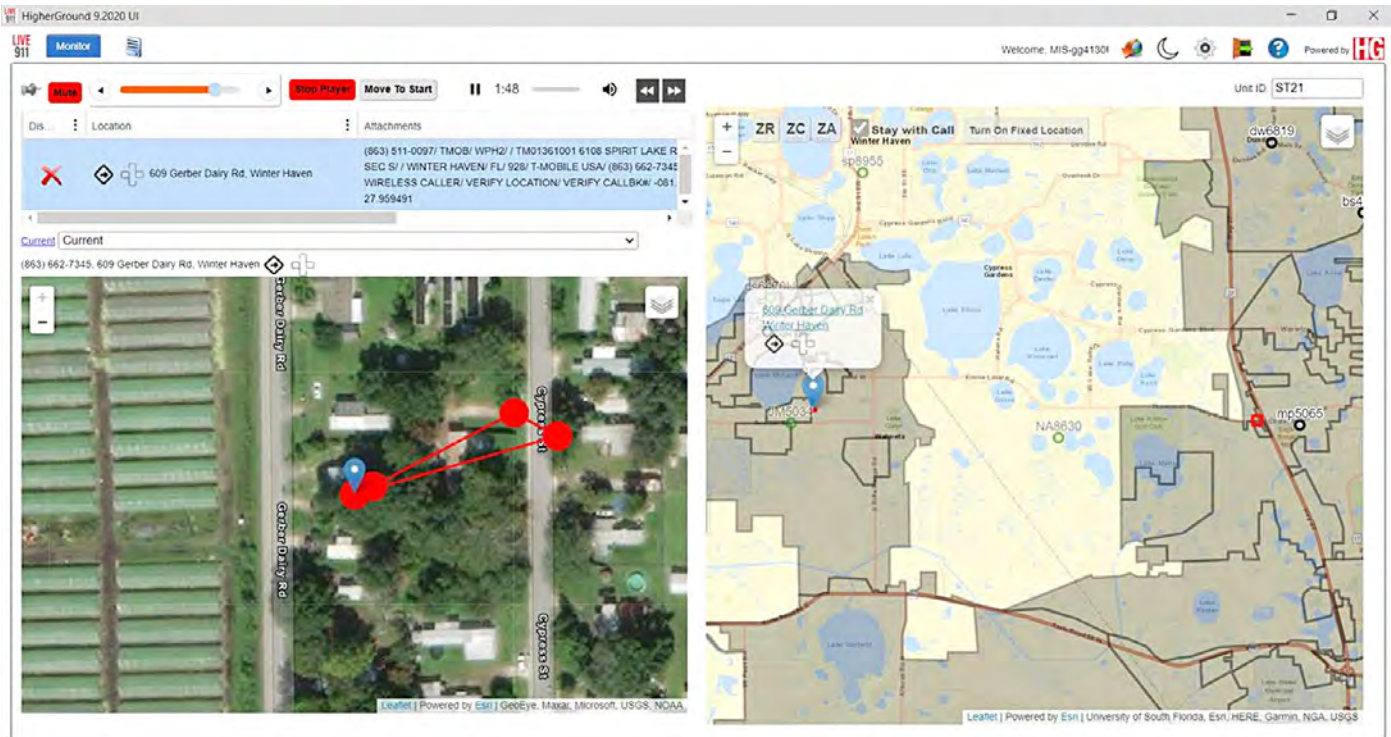


# LISTENING LIVE

Live-streaming emergency 911 calls improves officers' response times and situational awareness

By Tom Goodwin



Deputies on patrol can receive alerts from geofenced areas only.

In emergency response, every second matters. Now, a new technology is bringing down response times by securely livestreaming 911 emergency calls directly to authorized officers in the field and providing the precise location of the callers.

When using Live911, officers hear calls for service as they come in, similar to scanning other radio frequencies. If they choose, deputies can preset a geofenced radius to hear only the calls near their current location.

When a call is urgent and officers are free to assist, they can see the location of the caller on a map and move in the direction of the incident, giving them a head start and allowing them to develop a response plan while en route to the call.

All the while, deputies hear the interactions between caller and the call-taker, including details that may not be entered into CAD such as answers to questions, firsthand descriptions, emotional tones, and background noise from the scene.

## Communications for communities

Polk County is the fourth-largest county by area in Florida. The Polk County Sheriff's Office (PCSO) employs more than 1,700 full-time staff (sworn, certified, and civilian), 300 part-time staff, and more than 3,000 volunteer members, and has earned 10 professional accreditations in various areas.

The sheriff's office administers patrol and investigative responsibilities in a vast primary service area that includes unincorporated regions of the county, as well as six municipalities that contract with PCSO to provide law enforcement services: Frostproof, Polk City, Eagle Lake, Fort Meade, Dundee, and Mulberry. The patrol area is separated into two divisions and five districts.

PCSO administers dispatch services for all police, fire, and emergency medical services in the county, with the exception of three cities that have their own public safety answering points (PSAPs). The service



area for the Emergency Communications Center (ECC) has expanded in recent years due in part to municipal partnerships. Last year, ECC received 671,042 emergency and non-emergency calls; of those, 281,585 were calls for service that required the dispatch of a sheriff's deputy and the provision of critical information to them in the field.

## A first for the county

First elected in 2004, Polk County Sheriff Grady Judd has served as president of the Major County Sheriffs of America and the

Florida Sheriffs' Association. He has an acute understanding of the importance of answering emergency calls, having started his law enforcement career working as a telecommunicator for PCSO in 1972.

Kim Riggall also has a long history with PCSO and currently serves as application support supervisor in the Information Technology Division. Riggall's role has grown from managing CAD and RMS systems to overseeing all technology applications used by the organization.

Early last year, Sheriff Judd heard about the Live911 system and asked Riggall to investigate. She reached out to HigherGround, the developer of the application and other solution-based software systems that capture, store, and retrieve telecommunications, location, and radio data.

### Geofenced response

PCSO ultimately signed on for an evaluation and testing period of six months to one year using 10 licenses in the southeastern portion of the county. The agency experienced some minor issues in the beginning, such as having to upgrade half of the deputies' laptops to a Windows 10 environment to install Live911. Deputies also needed an external, USB-connected GPS device to use the app.

**“In the first 30 days, we saved three lives.”**

*—Polk County (Florida) Sheriff Grady Judd*



“HigherGround’s team had to program Live911 to allow it to share the port while still allowing our mobile application to maintain that ABL/GPS connection for our officers’ safety,” Riggall says. “Honestly, I was quite surprised they were able to do that, because we’ve been trying to accomplish this with other software vendors, and nobody else could.”

One significant contribution from PCSO’s testing was improving upon the software’s geofencing capabilities to allow officers to filter and hear only live-streamed emergency calls within their designated area. “We are a large-scale organization with a large geography,” Riggall says. “When we first started the beta, our deputies were saying, ‘It would be easier to see my boundary, our sector, and the district beat boundaries.’”

HigherGround improved the geofencing feature from a standard circle with distance radius to a polygonal map overlay, allowing the configuration of more specific geofenced territories such as designated street borders or city limits. PCSO uses the map overlays to configure geofenced territories within its 2,010-square-mile jurisdiction.

“In the first 30 days, we saved three lives,” says Sheriff Judd. “We saved a child who was choking because we got there before fire or EMS. We also saved two people who were having cardiac arrests with our AED. Live911 is a remarkable tool that has helped us to arrive at emergencies quicker and save lives.”

### Lowering response times

Capt. Greg Goreck commands PCSO’s Southeast District and managed beta testing and implementation of Live911 for the entire Polk County Sheriff’s Office. “The Polk County Sheriff’s Office has always strived to embrace cutting-edge technology, to see how we can do things better, and to get accurate real-time information to our officers in the field,” he says. “Live911 allows us to do that.”

“So far, we have caught four hit-and-run suspects. With calls that are in progress, law enforcement is sometimes hindered by the delays associated with the normal



Polk County (Florida) Sheriff Grady Judd

procedure of daisy-chaining questions from the dispatcher, to the call-taker, to the caller and then awaiting the response back through the same chain,” Capt. Goreck says. “With Live911, when a witness calls in and is following a suspect, we are able to hear the play-by-play, turn-by-turn, and are able to make a stop within minutes.”

One deputy heard a call come in reporting a disturbance while monitoring Live911. Based on the agency’s 911 protocol, the call taker immediately asked the caller for the location of the incident, which was approximately a mile from the deputy’s location. The deputy was able to self-dispatch; arriving on scene in 1 minute, 13 seconds, he was able to intervene before a crime was committed.

Since the initial beta testing program began in 2021, PCSO has deployed 180 concurrent licenses to deputies. Its next step? To expand Live911 further by presenting the solution to city partners in the communities it serves. 🌟

*Tom Goodwin is vice president of marketing at HigherGround, where he leads branding, messaging, go-to-market strategies, and strategic product direction. Goodwin has been an industry thought leader and speaks worldwide at industry events and trade shows. For more information, visit [live911.com](http://live911.com).*