

Telecommunicator of the Year 2009

JoAnna Garza

Public Safety Dispatcher II

In the early morning hours of August 31st, 2008, JoAnna Garza answered the type of 9-1-1 call a dispatcher trains for, but hopes never to get. There was no voice on the other end of the wireless call. In the background, JoAnna could hear a female crying and sobbing uncontrollably. This by itself can make a dispatcher's heart race, but it was the profanities and threats spewing from a strong male voice in the room which made JoAnna's heart stop.

A single skipped beat of her heart is all JoAnna hesitated. She immediately checked her screen to find the call was being made from a phase two wireless phone. Taking the coordinate information and the closest address information, JoAnna used the mapping system to attempt to pinpoint the caller's location. While mapping the address, JoAnna continued talking into the phone, hoping the female caller would get a chance to get on the line and speak. All the while, JoAnna was planning what she would say if the vicious sounding male subject got on the line.

Within one minute of answering the call, JoAnna obtained an address, entered a call sheet, and retransmitted the coordinates. Officers were immediately advised of the situation and dispatched to the closest address the coordinate search had produced. JoAnna continued to try to glean as much information as possible from listening to the open line and then relaying what she heard to the primary dispatcher, who would then relay it to the officers in the field.

As JoAnna listened, she became more fearful for the safety of the woman. The male subject had escalated from verbal abuse to physical assault. She heard the female crying out, no longer able to see out of the eye in which she had been kicked. JoAnna's heart broke over what the woman was enduring and she silently encouraged the officers to hurry. As JoAnna listened, the suspect cursed and yelled at the caller, not realizing every word he shouted was being heard by others and recorded for use in his prosecution. JoAnna waited and willed the woman to hang on for help. Finally, a moment came when the female was alone and able to speak to JoAnna. She desperately pleaded for help and managed to cry out the correct address. She was only one house away from the address JoAnna was able to determine! JoAnna's quick thinking sent officers in the right direction.

As soon as she gave the correct address to the officers, she began attempting to pull more information from her caller, but it was too late; the male had re-entered the room. He continued to scream at the female caller, who once more began to cry uncontrollably. With all that was going on, JoAnna stayed calm and focused, using a soothing voice, and never sounding nervous or as if she did not have control of the situation. Unfortunately, the call was disconnected four minutes after the male re-entered the room. The responding officers later found the mail had discovered the phone, realized it was an open line, and destroyed the phone in a fit of rage. He then fled the residence before officers arrived.

No one will ever know what might have happened if the woman had not been able to call 9-1-1 or if JoAnna had been unable to locate an address. Luckily, all JoAnna needed was the one minute to locate an address and enter the call. Within minutes, officers were on scene and getting medical attention for the woman who had bravely made the call and trusted her safety and life to a dispatcher. Although officers did not reach the scene in time to apprehend the assailant, thanks to JoAnna, they were able to help the victim.

JoAnna takes hundreds of calls a month and, in each one of these calls, JoAnna always shows her professionalism, compassion, and intelligence. She can always be counted on to give 110%! I am both excited and proud to nominate JoAnna Garza for the Telecommunicator of the Year award.

Valentino Barela Jr.
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