



POLICE CENTRAL

DISPATCH

Passaic County Sheriff Implements New Jail System

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by Warden Charles Meyers, Passaic County Sheriff's Department



The Passaic County Sheriff's Department Jail

When Jerry Speziale was elected Sheriff in Passaic County, NJ, he knew he had some challenges at the Jail. The most obvious was the lack of modern computer technology at the 1500 bed facility in downtown Paterson, NJ. The Jail had no computer system, but they did have *"The Board"*.

"There had been virtually no investment in PCs and networks prior to my election," said Sheriff Speziale. "This Jail was run for years on paper and pencil. All jail records were maintained on typewritten cards and docket books. The Jail Census was kept on a handwritten display called *The Board*."

"The Board" was the key to managing the Jail; everyone relied upon *The Board* containing all the names and housing locations of all inmates. Typewritten tags were inserted and moved by hand as an inmate housing location changed or the inmate went to court or the doctor. "Many times over 150 inmates would be moved, particularly on court days. While *The Board* worked, it was a nightmare to maintain," said Sheriff Speziale. "And, the workload was actually doubled -- we had to record a move out and another move back in."

"To assure accuracy, records and lists were duplicated by hand and double-checked against *The Board*," according to Passaic County Warden Charles Meyers. "But, the existing paper records were hard to maintain, and were easily misplaced. And, paper records can only be used by one person at a time."

The first step toward modernization was to search for an integrated Law Enforcement system for both the Jail and other departments of the Agency. Capt. Jim Hearney, a veteran deputy of many years, was tasked with finding a software solution that would handle Jail Operations, as well as Criminal Warrants, Civil Process, Field Interviews, and other important



An officer in Central Control maintaining *"The Board"*

applications. "It was important to find a truly integrated solution. We wanted to avoid having separate systems for each division," said Capt. Hearney. "We put out a Bid, and started looking at the Responses. Eventually we looked at a number of different systems over a period of several months."

One of the responders to the bid was Police Central, Inc. of Atlanta, GA. Police Central offered a complete suite of Law Enforcement "modules", each addressing a specific application. While each module is fully functional on its own, the "system" is fully integrated and shares data between each application.

Just as important, Police Central is a "web-enabled" application, meaning that any Sheriff's Department user gets full access to the system through Microsoft Internet Explorer. "This really got my attention," said Capt. Hearney. "We don't have a large IT department, so anything we could do to ease their support role would be welcomed. Browser-based computing seemed to be heaven-sent, because we don't have to load software on every PC." All data would be fully secured within the Agency on their in-house server, and access would be provided by the sheriff department's secure intranet.

Capt. Hearney and his team spent many weeks examining bid responses, and eventually selected the Police Central proposal. The following months were spent gathering information and developing a deployment plan. "We had Police Central in here many times to meet our people and learn our procedures," said Capt. Hearney. "We got our staff involved, from our Warden and Deputy Warden to our Sergeants, officers and civilians." Concurrently, a new Dell Server and 75 PCs were ordered and installed, including a new network and network cabling. Police Central provided specifications for a network server that would store all data in a Microsoft SQL database, along with all mugshot photographs.

Capt. Hearney also managed the changes required to "localize" the software to the Department's needs. And, he asked Police Central to establish a "training" database to teach users without affecting live data.



Training at the Passaic County Police Academy PC Lab.

He arranged formal User Training at the Passaic County Police Academy in the Computer Lab, and over fifty users attended the initial training sessions. "That was really helpful," said Capt. Hearney. "It got the users together in one room to share ideas, problems and solutions."

"This was really a department wide effort," said Sheriff Speziale. All our operational units participated, and IT built the technical infrastructure. Everything was in-place when the software arrived."

Once training was completed, an early Saturday morning was selected by Warden Meyers as the "Go Live" date. Saturday morning was chosen because it is a

relatively quiet time. "Monday is traditionally the busiest at the Passaic County Jail, with large numbers of Inmate movements to Court, so by starting on Saturday, we had two full shake-out days prior Monday," said Warden Meyers. "We were a little nervous that Go Live would be tough; but it really went very smoothly." According to Warden Meyers, there was a lot of concern about discontinuing *The Board*. "One Sergeant said he would chain himself to *The Board* to prevent its removal," laughed Warden Meyers. "But after a few days, this same Sergeant was ready to tear it down himself! It was amazing how much effort went into maintaining *The Board*. And if a tag fell off *The Board*, then the count was off and it was a nightmare. Now it's all in the system, and everything is done with a simple mouse click."

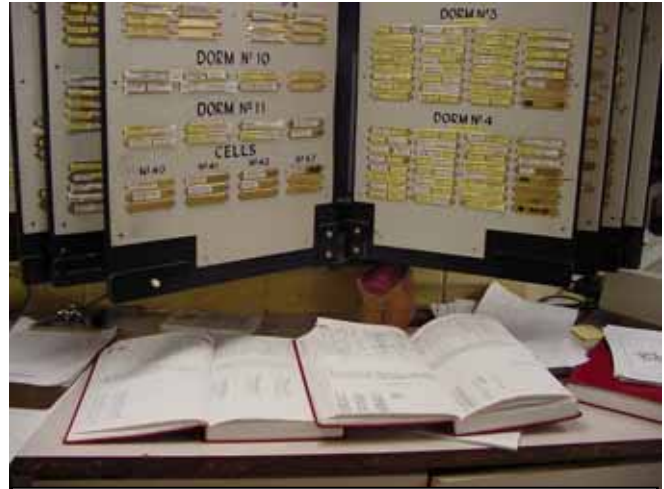
The Passaic County Jail receives inmates from sixteen municipalities in the County, as well as INS and State inmates. Inmate reception starts at the Sally Port where the Arrest Record is created. "The system automatically informs the Booking Officer if the inmate has been here before," says Warden Meyers. "That way we know his history, including any threats, gang affiliations or other dangers associated with the

inmate.” From there, the inmate is fingerprinted on a Sagem Morpho Livescan, and mugshot photographs are entered into the record.

“We now take digital mugshots, and add photos of Marks, Scars, Tattoos and any Inmate Injuries,” said Meyers. “That really helps our Gang Unit, and is also useful for investigations. Once intake is complete, the inmate is housed appropriately. Once housed, the system takes over tracking all inmate movements and cell assignments until discharge.

“One of the best things about Police Central is its ability to track an inmate’s movement throughout the Jail,” said Warden Meyers. “Many of our inmates stay a long time, and the movement history of housing assignments is very helpful.

“The system tracks all movements, including actual housing assignments, medical visits, and court visits. Inmates that must be kept separate are maintained by the system as well.” And, if there are special movement instructions like “Move only with K-9,” the system will alert the floor officer automatically.



The Board, and docket books ... now a thing of the past

“We also take the inmate’s clothing and property immediately, to prevent contamination of the Jail,” says Warden Meyers. “It is all inventoried in Police Central, and the system automatically assigns a storage locker for the inmate property.” Once again, handwritten lists of inmate property and a log file of locations were eliminated. “In addition,” said Warden Meyers, “the system prints out a list of property stored over thirty-days so it can be destroyed, and our Property Room kept current.”



Scheduling an Inmate Move from one location to another

Now, any authorized staff member can access accurate jail records and photographs instantly. “One of the best reports is our Jail Population Report that contains inmate information and their mugshots. It really helps the floor officers identify their inmates,” said Capt. Hearney. The Jail Census can be displayed or printed whenever necessary. And the computers up on the floors tell our staff when inmates need to be moved or prepared for court visits -- and when to expect them back. In our old paper-based system, changes might not get to all the officers immediately. “But now,” said Warden Meyers, “everyone who accesses a record has current information.”

“The reports from Police Central are great,” said Sheriff Speziale. “I can get up to the minute reports about my population, or inmates who are gang members, or INS inmates. And, I don’t have to call someone or wait for a printed report. I can bring it up on my own computer.”

While Police Central provides a wide variety of standard reports, it also permits the Sheriff’s Department to create and save their own reports without having to rely on the vendor. “Every Jail is slightly different. But our Police Central software allows us to customize our reports to suit our local needs,” said Warden Meyers, noting that many alternative software packages they considered would have required that users rely only upon standard reports supplied by the vendor, or pay extra for custom reports.

The next step will be putting the Warrant Division and Civil Division onto the new system. “If we get a Warrant or Civil Paper for a person who is already in our Jail, the system will automatically tell us,” said Sheriff Speziale. “That was almost impossible in our old paper-based system, and we spent lots of time looking for people that we already had in custody. Plus, sometimes we served a Civil Paper, but we were unaware that the person might also have an Outstanding Warrant.” The new system automatically cross checks all divisions for outstanding information, which will not only improve efficiency, but be a safer environment for the deputies.

The installation of the system in the Jail went smoothly. However, Warden Meyers emphasizes the need for preparedness and training. “We spent a lot of time with Police Central examining our procedures. I cannot emphasize enough the need to be flexible and be prepared to make positive changes,” said Warden Meyers. Many things were being done at the Jail “because it always had been done that way. Police Central was very good about encouraging us to change in a positive way.”

Finally, “The Freeholders and citizens of Passaic County have been terrific,” said Sheriff Speziale. “They recognized that these improvements at our Jail cost money, and they supported my modernization initiative with adequate funding. I feel that it will pay dividends for many years in the form of a safer, more efficient Jail for Passaic County.”