

**Lisa:** First thing I'm going to ask you guys to say is just your names and your positions and your organization.

**Melissa:** Melissa Alterio. I'm the executive director for Cobb County Department of Emergency Communications.

**Robbie:** And I'm Robbie McCormick. I'm one of three deputy directors, particularly over training quality assurance and professional standards for Cobb County.

**Lisa:** Yeah, and then also feel free, you can look at me, look at the camera. Okay. Whatever you want to do. Alright. Does your ECC have a program where you work with students whether in high school, vocational school, or local colleges? And if so, can you please describe it?

**Robbie:** Okay. Yes. We have, we work through what they call the CTAE, which is career technical, agricultural, educational pathways. They initially had just the explorers for police and the equivalent for fire. And through a series of meetings, which I understand we may go into some background later, but through a series of meetings, they developed a pathway for 9-1-1. And so, we partner with, originally, Osborne High School. We have a couple more that we're meeting with, to begin there. And Osborne has even kind of now evolved into a different type of program mainly because APCO now has those designations to do so. But yes.

**Lisa:** Yeah.

**Melissa:** I'm going to be speaking about this very thing tomorrow.

**Lisa:** So, would you describe your ECC as being small, medium, or large?

**Melissa:** Oh, we are definitely large. By CALEA standards, we're considered a large center. We have a 160 person team.

**Lisa:** What is the goal of your student program?

**Robbie:** To help them develop while they're still in high school an interest and knowledge of the 9-1-1 industry so that when they graduate and become eligible by local, municipality and county, age limits, more often than not is the age limit, that they can go straight into our industry, into that profession with some added knowledge, a little bit of head start. So, when they graduate and they go through this pathway, we have partnered with APCO and designed the Public Safety Telecommunicator 1 course to be delivered over a semester. So, in that semester that we're in the classroom teaching them, they're actually gaining their 1st certification, national certification in the profession. And they have a pretty good basic

idea of what the profession entails. So, the goal is to snatch their interest early while they're still in school.

**Lisa:** So, you go into the schools, and you teach APCO's PST 1 course?

**Robbie:** This next semester will be the first semester we'll be in the schools, not directly teaching. We'll be helping the teacher in that pathway class because now she has the student educator designation with APCO.

**Lisa:** Oh, great. A membership.

**Robbie:** Yes, yes.

**Lisa:** Oh, excellent. Okay. Wonderful. Alright. And what are some other activities that you guys do with the schools other than teaching?

**Robbie:** In particular with the same group?

**Lisa:** Any group.

**Robbie:** So, we have a public education, I'll let Melissa, she directs the public education and...

**Melissa:** We do. We have a community outreach recruitment education team and they do a variety of community events which includes going to schools, doing various assemblies, speaking about 9-1-1, but also just being more active in the community. We participate in the youth leadership in Cobb County and that this past year has garnered two things from 9-1-1, is, one, we led the public safety day, which was the first of its kind, in this program. So, we were excited about that. Our Cobb County Chamber of Commerce, facilitates this program. And we have been out there in the community so much and just educating everybody on 9-1-1 that the chamber came to us and said, hey we do a public safety day and this year for our youth we would really like 9-1-1 to start it off which is obviously very appropriate because we're the first of the first responders. And so that was really beneficial. And then we started bringing them in for tours and stuff and so we're also getting our program for internships starting to just take fruition and start to get out there as just an opportunity that we have for them as well. So, variety of stuff for our education, but they stay very busy.

**Robbie:** Yeah.

**Lisa:** Okay. How do you guys measure success for the program?

**Robbie:** So, our first semester, we actually hired, well, we interviewed and tested two and ended up hiring one from this first semester. And she completed the training program and

decided that she wanted to go back to school. So, she's no longer there, but it was successful in garnering a student straight out of high school, going through the program. And she was a real, she was a real delight for everyone also. She brought a brand-new perspective to, you know, her shift and the training department. So, the second semester, it just happens that no one in the class, everyone was juniors, so no one's graduating. Right? So, we did not get to hire straight out of that particular class, but now they're seniors in this coming semester. So, we'll see what we garner out of that. But success, I think, is that not just that they come to Cobb, but that they seek careers and professions in 9-1-1 because of that interest that sparked in getting to discuss that part of public safety with them early. Police and fire have been doing it for a minute. Right? So, entry into the schools at that level now is letting them see where the calls start with, you know, where it all begins. And it's been kind of an eye opener for them. They're like, yeah. We just felt like 9-1-1 was this thing that happened out there.

**Melissa:** No idea.

**Robbie:** Not quite sure how it worked. And then when we get them into the center and let them see it, and just the look on their face and the questions they start asking is a very good judge of success as far as gaining their interest.

**Lisa:** Yeah. And I'm sure it's helpful too for them to see that it's an actual career in a way and not just...

**Robbie:** And we discuss that a lot because they get to meet everyone. They get to meet community relations department in public ed and they get to visit with our IT professionals, right? And they get to see the people that are in quality assurance and even meet vendors sometimes. There's just we discuss all the ways that this career can blossom.

**Lisa:** That's great. Can you tell me a little bit more? You mentioned about your internship program and how that works?

**Melissa:** It's more it's more of the county, the Cobb County internship program. And we have had just a few people in in the last couple of years where we'll just bring them in to do a variety of things like Robbie said. Well you know, one, we want them to observe and to get some education on what it is that 9-1-1 does, what we do on the floor, but then also there's a ton of other tasks that we do, administrative tasks, all the things like in Robbie's division that help make the center run, and it's just it opens up so many doors and just eyes to, everybody involved, as to what the professional development and career advancement is like in 9-1-1. So, it's still very young for 9-1-1, in its infancy, because when we're asked about you know do you want an intern and how will that work?

For us, it, we have to have something to do. You know what I'm saying? So, we have to have something for them to be tasked with in order for us to be successful in the program which is why we've only had maybe three in the last three years. But we're hoping to grow that program here pretty soon.

**Lisa:** All right, well, speaking of the program being young how did it begin at your ECC?

**Melissa:** Honestly... as far as the intern program or the career pathway program?

**Lisa:** Career pathway program.

**Melissa:** I'm going to actually, because I was going to speak on this a little bit tomorrow, but it started with a conversation before Robbie got into the position of deputy director at Cobb County. And like she said, police and fire, the gentlemen at Osborne High School had these conversations with them, and fire department was already doing it for quite a few years. And so then they came to us and were like, we'd really like to get 9-1-1 involved. Again, it was something that he had seen at a community event and was like 9-1-1 is a really important part of this. The fire department sort of helped with that partnership as well and said you really should get 9-1-1 involved. And so when Robbie came on, the huge benefit to that led to the continuous success of this program, even though we're only hitting our third semester, is the partnership with APCO. And that is something that I don't feel like anybody else would have thought of, quite frankly, had we not had the, the success that we personally have with APCO already. We're adjunct instructors. We've been teaching the core telecommunicator classes for a year, and we classify ourselves, or the industry classifies us, as subject matter experts. So, I would say the partnership with APCO to make sure that we can give them something tangible to come out of that program with is by far the most unique thing that I think our centers are seeing here in the industry. And we feel very proud and very humbled about the fact that it was part of a motivating factor for APCO to include that in their membership and now the career instructor pathway for, for schools.

**Lisa:** Are there any plans to teach any more advanced courses at any point in different colleges or anything like that?

**Robbie:** So, we have talked to a couple of technical colleges as well. That's a little bit more involved because then it requires going through degree plans, which also require going through all the departments to make sure, you know. So, there's some different levels there as far as just going through a certification class or maybe incorporating it into or making it into an associate's type of a thing. So those are a little slower going as all the departments that you go through. But one of the things early on when we met with them is that they handed myself and my training manager, they handed us the benchmarks for Georgia's, you know, Department of Education. And they had all of these things they were trying to

somewhat hodgepodge together to meet the benchmarks for the program. And I remember looking at Todd, I'm like, I have one course that will hit all of these things, and it's kind of turnkey. So, the introduction of PST 1 from APCO at that point, that's kind of how that started was not only is it meeting national standards and it's nationally recognized certification, it also met all of the Georgia Department of Education's benchmarks for Pathway. So, it was very easy for them to say, hey. Yes. That's what we want. And then the further meeting with them to say, can we break this up, take our 40 hours and stretch it out and include, like, the simulator work and all that kind of thing into it for the semester that they need? And, I mean, it's just kind of grouped in it.

**Lisa:** Yeah. Do you have any advice for the first steps or small steps a smaller ECC could take if they're looking to try to reach out and build those relationships with local schools?

**Melissa:** I don't think it makes a difference small, medium, or large ECC. I think the opportunities are there, to be persistent and to make sure you're having those conversations and don't just wait for them to come to you. I mean, in this instance, they did come to us, but we also had a nudge from the fire department to say, you know, you should really do this. And I think that knowing now that this is an opportunity that is out there, I would absolutely wholeheartedly just go out there and have those conversations no matter the size of your ECC.

**Robbie:** I think one of the important things is to go into the meetings with knowledge about what they can do. And, you know, it was fortuitous. It was that being I or my training manager, even Melissa did, that was all to ourselves. It was, it was fortuitous for us, but now I see the benefit of going in and having that knowledge of what's out there curriculum wise, being able to deliver and how it can be delivered. So, I think doing a little bit of research beforehand before you start into these conversations, like what is it that we need? What are we looking at? And again, because APCO now has the students can be registered membership as an agency and the instructor can do this for your instructor makes it that much easier because we were providing all the instruction because it wasn't possible at this point.

**Lisa:** Any other, anything to add and last remarks?

**Melissa:** I think that's the difficulty or the challenge with even some smaller ECCs as far as group membership with APCO. Sometimes they just don't know what APCO is offering. And so this, and I know John is going to speak to it tomorrow as well, but the career instructor pathway is just huge because before this, it was like, how are we supposed to make this happen? How are we going to make it beneficial for them?

And we are of the mindset, like we, like Robbie said, we don't want to just limit it to Cobb County because we know everybody out there is struggling. And so, if we train somebody with this PST program at Osborne High School and they go to some place in Texas, then that makes us successful.

**Robbie:** They take it with them. As a, you know, model or prototype. Hey. I've done this before.