

# 'FIRST FIRST RESPONDERS' GET BETTER DIGS IN NEW POLICE HQ

## COMMUNICATIONS BUREAU IS OFTEN THE PUBLIC'S FIRST CONTACT, TAKING MORE THAN 350,000 CALLS A YEAR

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There's a term that Staff Sgt. Dave Cross uses to describe the people who work in the Halton Regional Police Service communications bureau: The first first responders.

The team of civilian employees who take incoming calls, and handle dispatch and route calls between police officers are often the first point of contact when a member of the public reports trouble — putting them in a crucial role.

"It's a challenging area because of what we're dealing with on a daily basis," said Cross, who manages

the team of about 62. "It is a very demanding role they undertake, day in, day out."

Until now, the bureau has been working out of cramped conditions in the headquarters built in 1991. But with the new Halton police headquarters opening Sept. 24, the communications team will work out of a bigger, brighter room with a reorganized seating plan, designed to help dispatchers work together better and plan emergency responses faster, says Cross.

"The current positioning isn't optimal for some of the processes," said Cross, who has been managing the bureau for about three years. "As things progressed over time in this facility, and our space was becoming a premium, a lot of the workstations didn't get integrated in the right areas. This move is allowing us to put the dispatchers (for different parts of the region) in a better area so they can talk a lot easier among themselves... If a call originates in Oakville but



Graham Paine/Metroland

The 911 communications centre at the Halton Regional Police Service's new headquarters is four times larger.

it's going to Burlington, we will be able to manage that easier."

All 911 in Halton Region are routed through the police communications centre, which often will redirect calls to the fire department or emergency medical services, depending on the nature of the issue. Calls to 911, however, are not the most

common type of call the centre manages. Of 351,000 calls bureau staff processed last year, only 114,000 were related to emergencies. More commonly, says Cross, people call with non-urgent police matters such as thefts.

The expanded space in the new building will allow for more training, which staffers already undergo bi-

monthly in order to stay on top of constantly evolving procedures and policies. It will also make life at work a more comfortable experience overall, says Cross, with ergonomic workstations, better acoustics and enough space that workers won't feel cramped. While most of these upgrades are focused on employee well-

### WHAT THEY DO:

Handle all incoming calls from the public, including 911, as well as dispatching units and rerouting calls between police officers.

### NUMBER OF STAFF:

About 62

### NUMBER OF CALLS IN 2017:


More than 351,000

### NUMBER OF 911 CALLS IN 2017:

114,000

being, he says happy staff will be "projected outward" to better public service.

"The big thing will be the internal morale and the wellness piece," he said. "You'd have to see our current facility and go over to the new one to see that it's like night and day. Making sure they're well enough to be here, that they like coming to work, will reflect as far as the public interaction goes."



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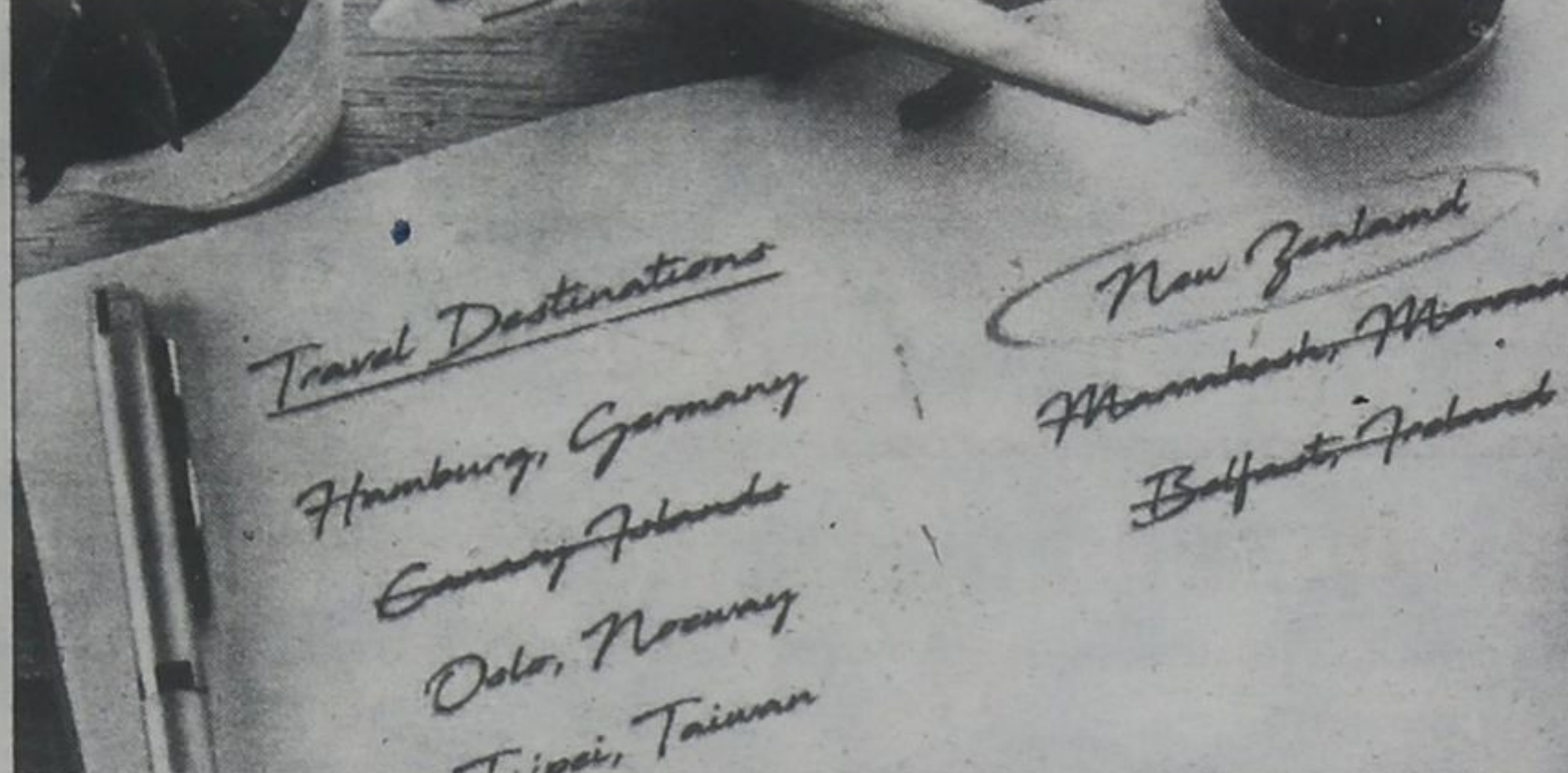
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