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OCTOBER 1989

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IACP Annual Conference Issue



U.S. Department of Justice
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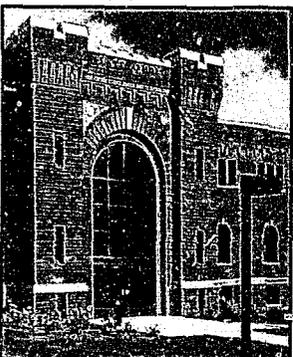
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Many of the details of Minneapolis' new Emergency Communications Center, located in the basement of the turn-of-the-century City Hall/Courthouse, both enhance the building's Romanesque architectural style and serve to dispel the sense of working underground. Note the extensive use of wood and windows.

Dramatic Underground Facility Completed for MECC

Last spring, the Minneapolis Department of Emergency Communications, also known as the Minneapolis Emergency Communications Center (MECC), moved into a dramatic new facility located in the sub-basement of the nearly 100-year-old Minneapolis City Hall/Courthouse. The design of the new facility is unique in that it incorporates the turn-of-the-century architectural character of the old City Hall while encompassing all-new, state-of-the-art electronic systems and work facilities for those who answer 9-1-1 calls and provide police and fire radio dispatching for the city of Minneapolis.

The facility was built at a construction cost of \$2.4 million, which came from city general obligation bonds. The electronic subsystems to support the 9-1-1 and emergency communications functions of the MECC come from a variety of suppliers and cost \$1.6 million, for a total facility cost of \$4 million.

The components of the new electronic subsystems are a computer-aided dispatch system, an enhanced 9-1-1 call processing system, computerized radio control consoles and audio recording facilities. Designing and building the new space presented numerous challenges to MECC staff, the architect and the mechanical and electrical

engineers. Digging out a 100-year-old basement floor to lower its level by four feet provides lots of surprises, from sewer lines not believed to be there to hard rock pits used when the space was a testing lab for the city. In the end, all of the challenges were met and the new 11,000-square-foot communications center challenges visitors to imagine that they are 30 feet below ground in a 100-year-old building. Particular attention was paid to details that both enhance the building's Romanesque architectural style and provide an unparalleled space specifically designed to meet the personnel and operational needs of the 70 civilian communications professionals who staff the facility round the clock. These features include:

- A two-level space, with administrative and support functions in the upper and lower levels of a two-story shell surrounding the Communications Center.

- An Operations Center with work stations for ten 9-1-1 operators, seven police dispatchers and three fire dispatchers, which features special "sound soak" walls to absorb the constant chatter of phone and radio traffic, a special 18-foot-high ceiling and a large wall filled with frosted-glass, back-lit windows to provide a feeling

of openness and dispel the sense of working "underground," and infinitely adjustable direct and indirect lighting.

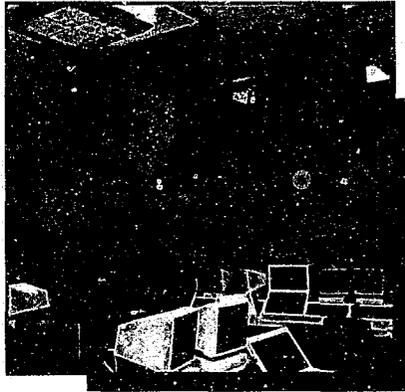
- Functional space for the new Minneapolis Emergency Operating Center (EOC), where municipal leaders will meet regularly to make and rehearse plans for major disasters, and to which they would report to manage such an event, should one occur. It is equipped with two-way radio capabilities for all city services as well as "fail-safe" telephone capabilities and a small kitchenette and restroom to support long-term operations. When not in use as an EOC, the facility will be available as a conference and training room for the city's public safety agencies.

- Dedicated, functional space to meet the MECC's ongoing training needs.

- New office space for the city's Department of Emergency Preparedness immediately adjacent to the training and EOC facilities.

- A sophisticated "Uninterruptible Power Supply" system to provide conditioned and interruption-free AC power to all the new electronic equipment.

- A functional kitchen area for MECC staff, who are required to take their break periods in the facility.



Top right: Windows into the Emergency Operating Center are on the left, the Observation Gallery on the right and the CAD computer is pictured lower left. **Bottom right:** A typical 9-1-1 operator console—there are 10 of these—features an adjustable keyboard shelf and a low console profile.

- A quiet break room where MECC staff can get away from the stresses of handling 400,000 emergency events each year.
 - A small but functional exercise room with aerobic exercise equipment and a shower, to provide staff in an otherwise sedentary job the chance to burn off some stress and calories.
 - An observation gallery overlooking the Operations Center where visitors and tour groups may look on without disrupting ongoing emergency dispatching operations.
 - A sophisticated closed-circuit TV and broadcast radio system for security, as well as for viewing selected TV channels, such as cable TV weather radar during impending severe storms.
- A major component of the construction project involved renovations to—and the relocation of the access into—the Minneapolis Police Department Property & Evidence Storage area. This area had always occupied a cavernous space directly underneath the sidewalk and curb parking areas at the South 5th Street and 3rd Avenue South corner of City Hall, as well as numerous smaller storage areas in the area that was to become the new MECC.
- This aspect of the project presented

some of the most difficult challenges since it required that a new access route be made for entry to this highly secure area. This was accomplished by digging a tunnel under the City Hall "moat" on the 5th Street side of the building and connecting that tunnel to the back side of an already existing elevator that was used by the Property Unit to move goods from its office down to the basement. A new back door had to be added to this elevator as well.

A portion of the property room, which has ceilings nearly 20 feet high, was subdivided into three horizontal levels of storage, complete with a small elevator for moving items up and down. A special waterproofing protection was added to the unfinished walls of the property room and sprinklers were installed in the entire area for fire protection.

During the two-year construction cycle, the Property & Evidence Unit temporarily relocated to a city warehouse at 61st and Harriet Avenue South.

Now the new property room is secure, with access available only to authorized police personnel, and increased storage and environmental controls to protect its highly important contents. ★

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