



Williamson Co. Dept. of Emergency Communications, Franklin, TN

Ahead of a decision that consolidated dispatch centers from the cities of Franklin and Williamson County. Williamson County Dept. of Emergency Communications in 2016, employee schedules were being assembled using a digital scheduler that was at best, “clunky,” said director Stephen Martini.

“Only one person was familiar with it, and that was the director who I replaced. So when I came in, no one was really familiar with how to work it and support was our largest concern.”

“We combined centers on paper in June 2016 and moved into a new facility in November 2016. We knew we needed a scheduling software that worked for about 45 people, (and) had lots of good support from a content-creation standpoint.”

“Aladtec has a feature where if I need to move someone’s schedule from this place to that place in an hour, I can just really easily click and drag with my mouse ... move them into a different day, slide the number of hours down from 12- to 8, up from 8- to 10-- whatever it is, to cover those gaps. The other software was just very slow, very time-consuming.

“I’ve got supervisors that are actively working consoles. They’re dispatching calls, answering phones, and they don’t need anything that takes extra steps to get done. If they get a phone call in the middle of it and it says -- someone’s running late or can’t come into work because of an illness or car trouble, you need to be able to quickly put that person out and quickly notify the next person who could come in to cover that shift.”

Martini discovered Aladtec while attending the 2017 APCO conference in Denver with another Williamson DoEC supervisor and a training officer.

“We were walking the show floor, and I just said -- ‘Look. I’m tired of hearing complaints from the supervisors about the scheduling software. We’re here. There are vendors here that serve this community. Let’s go find our solution’”, recalled Martini.

“The demonstration blew me away. My supervisor was with me when we watched it, and



Department Info:

Roster: 44 civilian employees.

Calls: About 200,000 in 2017.

Service area: About 225,000 people, 584 sq. miles.

Facility: Williamson Co. Public Safety Center, 53,000 sq. ft., built in 2016 with six layers of reinforced glass and walls that can withstand floods and an F5 tornado. The \$27 million, two-story center also hosts an Emergency Op. Center with a 10-by 30-foot computer wall and 105 computer stations where county officials can join other public safety partners to address a major emergency or event.

Special challenges: One of Tennessee’s two largest counties outside of Nashville. Heavy traffic on Interstates 40, 65 and 840 through Williamson County. WCECC currently dispatches for 13 agencies, and will add three more in January 2019.

Aladtec users since 2017

Neighboring agencies also using Aladtec:

DCI Donor Services, Nashville; Maury Regional EMS, Columbia; Dickson County EMS, Dickson; Cheatham County EMS, Ashland City; Dickson County Emergency Communications Dickson; Hickman County EMS, Centerville; Robertson County EMS, Springfield; Robertson County 911, Springfield; Sumner County ECC, Gallatin; and the Lawrenceburg Fire Dept., Lawrenceburg.

we were both very impressed. This particular supervisor -- he's 25 years retired law enforcement -- kind of brings a critical eye to almost everything. He put the poor (Aladtec) guys through their paces there. 'Does it do this? Can it do that? I know you guys always say it can do this, but I want to see it do this, this, this, and this.' And everything he threw at them, they just took with a smile and showed how it worked. That was amazing. Then they gave me a quote that was about half of what we were paying currently."

A year later, Aladtec has become a familiar and vital tool at Williamson DoEC.

"It was not overly complex (compared with) deploying a 911 system or computer-aided-dispatch system or even a GIS update for mapping. The online web-hosted scheduling software is not the most complex thing we've put in place; however, it is critical. It's probably among the top three softwares that we use. The bulk of our employees recognize, and they see the real importance in (Aladtec). It impacts their day-to-day. 'When am I comin' to work? When do I go home from work? How much am I getting paid?' These are the questions they want to ask even before '9-1-1. What is the location of your emergency?' he said, chuckling. "Aladtec helps solve that."

"It's been great. It was a pretty easy training process. We did two web-based training sessions -- about an hour-long each with Aladtec -- and that was just creation of the system and understanding the various features. Outside of some anxiety on our side, because we were so familiar with all the complexities of the previous scheduling software, they were pleased with how it worked," said Martini.

They didn't even lean on Aladtec's Support Specialists to set up the first schedules.

"We built it out. We had a plan of what it looked like and how we wanted it set up -- three varying shifts on days, three varying shifts on nights. We work kind of a bizarre schedule with four days on, three days off, and in those four days, you work two 12-hour shifts and two eight-hour shifts somewhere in there. Some folks start with 12's and end with 8's. Some folks start with 8's and end with 12's. That's kind of the rhythm, and it covers pretty well for us, and it allows folks to have some family time, which is important to me," he said.

Martini's "best-guess" is that Aladtec saves his supervisors at least 10 hours per week over their old scheduling solution, but he said other dividends might be more significant than time-savings.

Aladtec's accessibility via smartphone gives "front-line users the ability to get in there and request time off, sign up for overtime. None of that was an option inside of our previous solution. If you wanted to request time-off, you did it by paper or by e-mail to the supervisor, then they had to log all those things. I'd say our supervisors have reduced time in it and our employees have increased time inside the scheduling software, but all to the good. And because they're in it, they have a little bit more self-control and self-awareness of what their schedule looks like and the ability to request days off and what-not. And that reduces our supervisors' amount of time that has to be spent doing those kinds of things."

Williamson DoEC staff is still exploring other Aladtec features and hopes to integrate it with their MUNIS payroll system soon.

"We're still filling out timesheets on a weekly basis, and we think we can get there and start factoring in earned overtime, holiday, vacation, sick accruals -- all inside of Aladtec. And that gives the employee a real-time look through that app on their phone. 'How many hours do I have for sick leave, for vacation leave, or how many did I earn?' -- all those things. And they can also get out of the business of printing and signing weekly time sheets, so that's on our list of things to accomplish in the year ahead."

Only a few weeks ago, Martini realized the value of Aladtec's audit trail when a supervisor alleged a leader from another shift had approved a reassignment that left him a dispatcher short.

"I put that over to our database specialist who sort of manages a lot of our software -- CAD, phone, and the Aladtec database -- and she quickly looked into the audit trail, found where this particular supervisor, was the person that approved this person's participation in a special assignment that took them off of their schedule.

"So here it was: this date, this time, this person approved this thing, and I just shared that with him and said -- 'Hey. It looks like you approved this time off, not this other person.' It solved the problem, it avoided the conflict, all those things immediately. The auditing component in this is great!"

Martini said another Aladtec benefit has been "the awareness for the employees of what they're doing, (and) awareness to the supervisor as to who they have on-shift and who they can expect."

"Bad scheduling software can screw-up morale for sure. And great scheduling software -- it's like (information technology). Like they say about your IT guy -- if you haven't seen him in a long time, then he's working his tail off, and if you see him every day because of problems, you're probably short on IT and not doing as much as they should. "If we don't think about our scheduling software, it's because it's working really well -- not because it's not valuable."



Stephen Martini

Stephen Martini has been director of the Williamson Co. Dept. of Emergency Communications since its inception in 2016. He previously worked 10 years as a dispatcher, training-QA specialist, and supervisor in Chattanooga and Brentwood, Tenn., 911 centers. He also serves as an APCO Institute Adjunct Instructor. Martini is a past chair of APCO's editorial committee and remains a regular contributor to Public Safety Communications magazine. A graduate of the University of Mississippi, he worked as a daily newspaper reporter, before becoming a police dispatcher. Martini has authored several books and is the owner-operator of Dry Ice Publishing; a small publishing house focused on printing mostly historical non-fiction or Christian education.