

Henry vows push for combined 911

Touts more GPS units, firefighters as medics

By Benjamin Lanka

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Fort Wayne Democratic mayoral candidate Tom Henry marked the sixth anniversary of the Sept. 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon by unveiling public safety initiatives.

Henry spoke in front of the city's new Public Safety Academy of Northeast Indiana, scheduled to open this fall. He said the \$27 million facility will help provide better training for first responders and make the city a national model.

"Protecting each citizen is a mayor's first responsibility," he said.

Henry also said he would push for a full consolidation of the Allen County and city 911 communication departments, a merger long sought by numerous officials. Henry said combining the two departments – which are separated by a glass wall – would help save money and provide better services.

Merger talks halted on numerous occasions after the city and county couldn't agree on who would have control over the new department. Sheriff Ken Fries and former Sheriff Jim Herman said the sheriff should ultimately be responsible for the department because that position is elected to provide public safety countywide. Police Chief Rusty York proposed a joint city-county board to control the department.

Henry said because he knows all the players involved personally, he believes he can build a consensus on the issue. Republican Matt Kelty has previously said he supports a merger of the two departments. Kelty's campaign did not return calls seeking comment.

Henry also said he wants to investigate providing a way for city firefighters to become certified paramedics. He said they already are emergency medical technicians, but providing additional training would help when firefighters arrived on scene before the ambulance.

Henry didn't comment on whether he would support the city fire department taking over ambulance service for the city – saying he didn't think it was being discussed at this point. Three Rivers Ambulance Authority contracts with Laidlaw Medical Transportation – also known as American Medical Response – to provide ambulance service in Fort Wayne.

The fire department has unsuccessfully bid for the city's ambulance service.

Henry said a combined 911 center should include ambulance dispatching as well.

Henry also said he would investigate equipping firefighters and police officers with Global Positioning Systems on their gear or in their vehicles. This would improve safety by providing the locations of public safety officers during an emergency.

He said he does not plan to use the program to spy on the locations of city employees.

He said he hoped grant money could be found to help pay for the program.

“To me, that’s not an expense, it’s an investment,” he said.

Henry also endorsed the city’s take-home police car program.

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