

St. Elizabeth's Hospital

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**St. Elizabeth's Hospital:
A Fire in the Hospital Was Just the Beginning**

Even after the Chicago fire department put out the physical fire at St. Elizabeth's Hospital last June, Steve Burnagieli, the company's assistant vice president of support service, had a fire of a different kind to overcome.

His task? How to get the hospital's 1,000-plus line telephone system functioning again within 24 hours. The fire, which started in the switch room, had left the hospital without phone service. About 1,000 employees and 250 doctors depend on the phone and overhead paging systems to do their jobs.

Before the emergency, the hub of the hospital's telephone system was a two-cabinet Model 80, which utilized more than 1,000 phone lines. Other equipment housed in the switch room included a mainframe, a PC to provide call detail recording, another PC to act as a service port for the switch, two printers, a PhoneMail system, a paging system, an overhead page and music-on-hold amplifier and a universal power supply.

Once the fire was extinguished, Burnagieli went into action. He called his customer service representative at Siemens, Bill Harper. "I received a message on my beeper at about 2 p.m. that said all the phones were down and the switch room was on fire," said Harper. "Since it was Friday, I knew it was going to be one heck of a weekend." Harper arrived on the scene about 45 minutes later. Burnagieli's first question: "What are we going to do?" Harper hadn't been in a fire situation like this before, "so my first thought was 'I have no idea,'" he said. Years of troubleshooting experience took over from there.

Harper worked closely with Burnagieli to assess the situation. Although preventive measures had been in place and the fire had been contained fairly quickly, the 14-by-25-foot switch room was demolished. Power supplies and cables were masses of melted plastic. What the fire didn't touch, the resulting smoke managed to damage.

All of the walls in the room had to be torn down and replaced, a new floor put in and everything cleaned and painted.

The Model 80, paging system, power supply and switch cables suffered the greatest damage. Harper started making phone calls to get help. His biggest challenge was how to replace the ruined Model 80. Then it occurred to him that the Model 20 switch Siemens used in its downtown Chicago office for testing could be used temporarily to give the hospital essential telephone services.

"I thought my boss was joking"

"I thought my boss was joking when he called," said Bill Botti, installation specialist, upon being alerted about the fire by his manager, John Cyr.

But by 6 p.m., Botti had picked up the Model 20 at the Chicago office and delivered it to the hospital. Then he and Harper programmed the switch and got phones working in critical areas.

"We were able to get dial tone on the temporary unit by midnight Friday and 70 phones working by 2 p.m. Saturday afternoon," said Burnagiel. "The overhead page system was running by Saturday evening, relieving the cell-phone-equipped security guards stationed on each floor for code blues and other emergency communication needs. We also set up a system to provide patients with cell phones on request." While Harper and Botti worked that weekend to get as many phones operational as possible, installation specialist Josh Paveza worked at obtaining a new switch, which is ordinarily a two-week process.

"In this case I discovered that the Siemens Cherry Hill Integration Center can perform miracles," said Paveza. "They built a Model 80 EX switch in two days. While working on it, they ran out of analog cards, so they brought a team in to build the cards from scratch. Now that's dedication and teamwork."

Anticipating the arrival of the new switch on Monday, Paveza asked about the strategy to move the system software from the old switch to the new one. He realized that his plan to load the backup tape of the old switch to the new box was unprecedented. The older Model 80 used 16-port cards while the new Model 80 EX uses 24-port cards. The cards could not be replaced one-for-one.

Suddenly, Pavesa's original plan for the weekend—to remodel his father's bathroom—was scrapped as he found himself at St. Elizabeth's, programming the old switch's software to work with the new Model 80 EX. This process required him to work through a 200-page PC file line-by-line. "My eyes were burning," he said. "But I'm proud to be a part of what I understand was the first ever and only field-upgraded Model 80 to Model 80 EX."

Many heroes

Paveza couldn't have done it without the help of Dave Gibson at the Siemens Technical Assistance Center in Dallas. Gibson wrote a step-by-step procedure for Paveza and talked him through the process.

"I called Dave at 4 a.m. Saturday, planning to leave a message. I was shocked to find him in the office," said Paveza. "He said he woke up realizing that he'd forgotten to tell me something about the software configuration. There's no doubt in my mind that St. Elizabeth's wouldn't have the necessary software without Dave's expertise and dedication."

Siemens business partners Condisco and Communications Contractors, Inc., also played key roles. Condisco installed a new power supply, power filter and panels and battery system. The CCI team did the cross-connecting, re-terminating all house and switch cables. They also supplied the paging equipment.

"Everything went so smoothly," said Botti. "Everyone knew their roles, acted as a leader and took pride in what they were doing."

By Gary Katz

How to minimize disaster damage

Steve Burnagiel and St. Elizabeth's were able to make the best of a challenging situation because of the great work by the Siemens team, lots of luck and some wise preventive practices that minimized the damage.

He offers this preventive advice in managing a switch room:

1. Don't keep fire extinguishers inside the switch room. The heat of the fire may prevent you from opening the door to access them. Instead, keep the extinguishers just outside the room.
2. Back up your data often.
3. Don't store back-up tapes inside the switch room; store them in a separate room.
4. Keep a database, including complete records of your cable set-up, and store them outside the switch room.
5. Keep blueprints of the switch room installation and store them outside the switch room.
6. Store important things in the switch room in metal cabinets to minimize the chance of them being singed or burned.
7. Keep the switch room neat. Be careful about clutter. Fire hazards are easy to overlook.
8. Keep drawings.