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## Need e-Help?

Call the Help Desk  
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Kelly Patton and her staff answer approximately 100 help calls a day, not including walk-in customers. Pictured are, from left, Bonita Martin, network support analyst; Patricia Clark, word processor operator; Maxine Drummond, network support analyst; Beverley Davenport-Waldon, network support analyst; Robert Eakins, network support analyst, and Kelly Patton, network support supervisor.

*Photo by Ned Racine*

## Deliverer of Bad News Really a Nice Person. Really.

- Kelly Patton manages the ITS Help Desk with calm humor

By Ned Racine, Editor

(July 23, 2008) For someone who delivers so much bad news, Kelly Patton, network support supervisor, seems to be a nice person.

She sends birthday cards to her parents in Florida and calls them every couple of days. She insists she's nice to her husband, and she recently devoted a weekend to moving her two daughters (24 and 21) into their first apartment.

But when email is down or needs to be purged, when the network catches a bug or a computer application becomes sick, it's Patton who delivers the bad news.

"I'm the mailman," she said. "I'm the grim reaper."

Since Patton completed her work helping build the Gateway Tower—when ITS asked her to leave General Services and join it—Patton has worked on Metro's ITS Help Desk. "They're both very customer service oriented, so it was very easy," she said of that transition 12 years ago.

Patton's five-person Help Desk crew services approximately 3,200 computers, not including the Blackberry devices. She praises the technicians who work to solve those computer problems. "They try really hard. Our technicians are magicians—[considering] the things they have to know and the different pieces that people have."

In fact, the biggest caller misconception she finds when answering the Help Desk line (2-4357 or 2-HELP) is that "we have techs just standing by ready to go out."

Patton's crew also handles cell phones and pagers, including the return of damaged devices.

"We've had pagers coming back with dog's teeth on them," she said, also recalling cell phones that have been dropped in swimming pools and glasses of orange juice or run over by a bus. Many have been dropped in the toilet. "When I hear that, I don't touch them. I like them to be in a plastic bag."

Having the Help Desk deliver bad news has two advantages, according to Patton. "Every body knows the Help Desk. And if people have a question, they have one central place to call."

When something does go awry, the Help Desk is usually the first to know because it receives calls from users. "I would say. . . 99 percent of the time the Help Desk knows first, from the users," she said. "All the lines light up. Then you know something's wrong."

When a system does go down, she typically receives the same questions: When will it be back up? How can I do my work without it? "There are workarounds, but we are such an instantaneous society now, " she said. "So people are used to being very fast with sending and receiving. People have withdrawal."

The subject of many of Patton's emails, the classic "E-mail Deletion" messages, enforce agency policy that email is not held longer than 30 days. She sends that email every 30 days, in part to prune old files living on Metro's email computers.

What's changed in 12 years? Kelly said the Help Desk handles more devices, with more users and more systems. Balancing that, Patton believes ITS has better, faster equipment.

"The users are more savvy now," she said. "They know more programs and they know more ins and outs. Sometimes they will ask you a question and you're thinking, 'What?' "

Patton is continually surprised that Metro's savvy computer users still fall for emails promising dubious offers, "That they really believe Honda will send you \$75."

She does get some cranky calls. "But if the system is down there is really nothing you can do until it's brought back up," she said. She does try to be polite and nice (there's that word again).

And she receives some bizarre calls. "We have had people call and say their ATM card doesn't work," she said. "People have called to say ' My cup holder (CD drive) doesn't hold my cup anymore. Because it's called the Help Desk, employees have called Patton's crew and asked where they could find toilet paper.

Robert Eakins, network support analyst, answers the Help Desk line, as do Patricia Clark, word processor operator, and Beverley Davenport-Waldon, network support analyst. Maxine Drummond and Benita Martin, network support analysts, also support the Help Desk.

Even with its frustrations, Patton enjoys her work. "It's fun almost every day," she said. "We have a good group of people at the Help Desk. We laugh a lot . . .a lot, because that is all you can do sometimes."

"You never know what's coming on that [next] phone call," she said.  
"You'll get someone who you'll do the simplest little thing for and they're so grateful. It makes everything OK."

Even working with good people and enjoying her job, Patton avoids both the telephone and computer when she arrives home on weekdays. "I'm done," she said.

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