

# A TALE OF TWO CITIES

**By Barry Furey**

**M**y browsing this week took me up and down the east coast, and, apologies to Dickens, to this tale of two cities. The first stop was in Coral Springs, Florida where the head of a state committee investigating the incident stated that a "Flawed 911 system 'absolutely' affected response to Parkland shooting." That's about as direct as you can get, especially given the sensitivity of the situation. For those unfamiliar with the scenario, it is not one that we haven't seen before. Two communities in the region are not part of the consolidated emergency communications center. The 9-1-1 calls from the school went to one of them, meaning that the bulk of information had to be transferred to dispatchers at the county. Expect posturing from both sides in the weeks to come on why the current configuration exists, but even in the wake of tragedy, don't count on rapid changes.

**H**eading northward like so many snowbirds do in summer, I came across some news from upstate New York where discussions heated up over whether a new fire chief should come from inside or outside the ranks. Among the reasons cited by the current chief for excluding external applicants were, "They won't know the routes to take. They won't know what time of day to modify routes because kids are getting out of school." Hey, I'm all for recognizing those who have been loyal to the city, but I think there are better ways to frame that. I post this here because it is reminiscent of the arguments used by police and fire chiefs nationwide against

consolidation. "Their people" knew "their town." No one even two feet over the municipal border could possibly provide such stellar service.

**N**ow this all sounds just like good old Sheriff Andy would like it to be, but we're not working with your grandad's 9-1-1. People with cell phones are travelling through your town every day. One community near my home is projected to grow by 60% over the next decade. None of these folks know where farmer Jone's prize heifer got run over by Lizzie McFarland's model T back in the day, nor do they care. What they do want, however, is for whoever answers the phone to be able to find them and send them help based largely on the information sent by their cellular device. The thought that "you can't get the job done if you're not from around here," doesn't hold water in this day and age, if it ever did. Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin seemed to do pretty good on the moon having not being born and raised there.

**H**owever, it's less likely that you'll get people to talk openly and honestly about these issues here on earth. Consolidation is scarier than cancer, to some, and the whiff of anything that smells like losing a piece of control is a foul smell indeed. But while we refrain from discussing items that we think might offend, others are growing less reluctant. The longer we delay, the greater becomes the risk that someone else will solve the problem for us. And in the real world, as in Dicken's novel, imposed solutions do not always happen without suffering.