



Wilton's 911 Consulting preaches emergency preparedness

By Evan Fallor

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Bo Mitchell, founder and president of Wilton-based 911 Consulting, knew even before he completed his 16-year tenure as Wilton police commissioner in February 2001 that he wanted to continue protecting people — specifically where they work.

On the force, he had seen much to mold his concerns, including business break-ins, workplace violence, fights and other serious threats at area schools.

Mitchell discovered businesses, schools contingency plans for such model to remedy that perceived lack of

Bo Mitchell

Immediately after he retired from the force, an emergency preparedness company Road. A sole proprietor, he set out to of fire, chemical spill, weather disaster, shooting or other unforeseen circumstances.



and other workplaces did not have emergencies, and he devised a business preparedness.

Mitchell, now 67, founded 911 Consulting, operating out of Mitchell Park on Indian Hill prepare workplaces for the possibilities

In early 2001, Mitchell discovered that for a number of reasons — including practicality, cost and lack of awareness — corporations were not eager to listen to the importance of instituting a federally mandated emergency action plan.

Seven months later, the largest workplace loss of life in U.S. history happened. Mitchell said 9/11 sparked a wave of sweeping workplace safety reforms — largely in major cities like Chicago and New York that featured high-rise businesses with a high number of employees.

"That provided a 'let's talk' moment," Mitchell said.

The early- to mid-2000s was also a peak for the Internet boom, which led to his name popping up prominently in search engines. Both then and now, Mitchell said, he faces little to no competition in his line of work.

It took him several years to fully develop a successful marketing strategy in the emergency management business, but living and working locally for 45 years provided him with connections far and wide. His business now provides services for more than 160 workplaces, including corporations like MasterCard Inc., in Purchase, General Electric and Hyatt, as well as for smaller entities like Bethel Health Care Center and the Bloomfield Police Department.

In March, his company was hired by H&R Block to create an emergency action plan at its worldwide headquarters in Kansas City, Mo.

For each business, Mitchell's process remains the same: Cultivate a lead in the workplace and find someone who believes in his or her colleagues' safety; then meet with as broad and senior a group of company managers as possible.

Next, he and his contractor, sometimes multiple contractors, conduct an assessment of a company's current emergency planning and training before creating an emergency action plan, with which they train all employees.

After the Sandy Hook school shooting in December 2012, Mitchell said concerns over student and teacher safety spiked not only in Fairfield County, but across the country. Previously, he said, school security discussions were "foreign" to many private school administrators. Mitchell's consulting business now services four colleges and universities and 25 secondary schools nationwide.

"Some of these secondary and private schools have some of the worst-planned emergency plans in the United States," Mitchell said. "That's not only my experience, but also from surveys done by the federal government."

He has a small administrative staff in Wilton, but Mitchell hires contractors when working out of cities like Washington, D.C., San Francisco or Los Angeles to make his operation feasible.

"Having a full-time employee who helps me plan and train World Trade Center 7 is not going to be the same person helping me train a school in Cleveland," Mitchell said. "I really need to be able to move from expertise to expertise."

When he's not in the office or on a plane, Mitchell uses his own expertise and personable character to present at national business conferences and seminars.

It is a chance for Mitchell to promote 911 Consulting, but it's also a federal requirement to maintain his standing as an expert consultant. Last week, he presented at both the National Facilities Management and Technology conference in Baltimore and at the Sungard Northeast User Group meeting in New Jersey.

"Nobody else goes to a convention and speaks about what I speak about," Mitchell said.

Mitchell additionally responded to several questions via email.

As the former Wilton Police Department commissioner, what skills from that role do you apply as the president of 911 Consulting?

"Understanding the interface of the role and responsibilities of emergency responders versus employers. It's especially important when responding to high rises, multiple tenant buildings, manufacturing and large employers."

When you began the company, did you envision serving clients as far away as California and other areas across the country?

"Long term, yes. Given that Fairfield County has so many corporate headquarters, I projected that this would come with time. It did."

When speaking at conferences across the country, what is the common feedback you receive from your colleagues?

"My management is in denial. My management doesn't know the law and their responsibilities. Bad things don't happen to good people like us; that only happens to them."

What advice do you give organizations that are still in need of emergency action plans?

"Conduct an assessment of your current emergency planning and training. You do this for your financials annually. Why not for the safety of your people?"