

## SMALL BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT

# Specialist in critical communication

## Skywave's products can help save lives

**Alan Morrell**

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USA TODAY NETWORK

Communication systems are certainly important, but emergency communication systems take the importance factor to a whole other level.

Emergency communication systems are the type used by police, firefighters and the like. The radios they use are much more sophisticated than those utilized by, say, taxicab companies. They have to be, because of the life-and-death situations that come with the jobs.

Skywave Communications is involved in the field of emergency communications. The Henrietta company designs, installs and maintains public-safety communication networks and equipment.

"Our radio system requires critical communication," said Skywave co-founder and vice president Ellison Patterson Jr. "It could be a difference of one syllable — shoot or don't shoot ... You might get only one chance to hit the 'help' button, a one-chance call for help."

That kind of precision and unflinching reliability requires top-shelf radios that Patterson said can cost \$6,000 each. They have to work no matter where the user takes them. As Patterson adds, grimly, "Our radios have to expand past the life expectancy of the (user)" and withstand temperatures exceeding 500 degrees Fahrenheit.

Patterson started the company with his wife, Elizabeth. What started in the 1980s as a side business — repairing TVs and radios — has grown into much more.

Along the way, Patterson worked full time in jobs including microwave engineering, connecting cellular towers for a phone company and delivering telephone systems over cable wire for the old Rochester Cablevision. By 1998, the Pattersons incorporated as Skywave Communications.

Patterson said he worked on installa-



Ellison Patterson Jr. aligning microwave signals. PROVIDED BY SKYWAVE COMMUNICATIONS

tions at the Rochester-area's new 911 center in the '90s, but Skywave no longer does much work for Monroe County. "For every other (local) fire department, EMS and some police departments, we handle the devices in their hands," he said. "We manage the radio systems."

The company concentrates on work for agencies throughout New York state, Florida, Pennsylvania and parts of Massachusetts. "We've been involved in 911 systems from Boston to Brunei," Patterson said, referring to the tiny country in southeast Asia. "We did a system for the Sultan of Brunei. Jack Nicklaus was there, building him two golf courses."

Skywave manages the University of Rochester's communication systems and works closely with Motorola Solutions as a certified "Elite Service Spe-

### Skywave Communications

**Founded:** 1998.

**Location:** 51 Goodway Drive, Henrietta.

**Executives:** Elizabeth Patterson, CEO and president; Ellison Patterson Jr., vice president.

**Employees:** 19.

**Website:** [www.skywave.org](http://www.skywave.org).

cialist" with the firm. Body cameras for police is a relatively new area in which Skywave is involved. Patterson also talked about an organization that will allow interoperability between disparate communication systems.

Skywave has been based on Good-

way Drive, off Winton Road, for the past three years. Before that, much of the work was done "out of trailers (and) living out of hotels," he said. The new set-up allows Skywave to build and test systems at its headquarters, bring the customers in for staging, then transport the completed systems to the necessary facilities.

Patterson shared Skywave's "creed," which reads, "What's it like to have someone's life in your hands working on this technology? It is a privilege and an honor to be trusted with that responsibility."

When precise communication is critical, Skywave Communications is there.

*Alan Morrell is a Rochester-based freelance writer.*