

Technology Can Necessitate the Need for Space

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NYSP Forensic Video/Multimedia Services Unit

Cathy Eckhardt is seen working, with Paul Munson in the background, inside the New York State Police Forensic Video and Multimedia Services unit's newly renovated office.

As technology progresses, the spaces that law enforcement agencies perform work in are becoming more important.

New York State Police recently addressed this need for its Forensic Video/Multimedia Services Unit by opening up a newly renovated state-of-the-art facility at its headquarters in Albany.

James Kennedy, the Director of Forensic Video and Multimedia Services for New York State Police, spoke to Officer.com about the renovation of the unit's office and the growing role of video in investigations.

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When the agency created a video production unit back in 1984, it consisted of just two employees who produced training tapes, public service announcements and a graduation video. While the Forensic

Video/Multimedia Services Unit still continues some of that work today, the focus of the focus of the unit has changed drastically over the years.

"About 15 to 18 years ago, we started to go to the field and started to videotape crime scenes and came back with higher quality video with our production cameras," he said. "A lot of our forensic investigations units started seeing the quality of the videotape and they started asking for our services more and more out in that field documenting crime scenes."

Kennedy said that the presence of video in investigations will only continue to grow as the technology advances and becomes more widespread.

"The importance continues to increase every year," he said. "The more and more systems that are out there -- that's only going to increase. What's good news to us is that as these new systems become available to businesses, we find the video we receive is better quality."

Prior to the renovation, the unit was housed in two small rooms containing several systems for the unit to work on. Those systems helped provide clarifications and forensic multimedia analysis to any digital or analog item submitted to the office.

"They were very small rooms," Kennedy said. "When we were completed with the analysis, a lot of times district attorneys, other investigators, other detectives would come into the office to see the results and we'd be crammed in that space."

The space wasn't the most efficient and didn't provide a professional atmosphere. With these issues in mind, officials began the process of expanding the office and found some underutilized space within the blueprint of the current office. Around April of last year, demolition began. It took most of the summer and in the fall, the new multimedia lab was officially opened.

"What the space has provided us is a clean, professional-looking workspace. In addition to the renovation, we were able to procure three additional systems," Kennedy said about the new setup that allows him the ability to staff six forensic analysts at each work station. "It's allowed us to now provide the analysis in a much more streamlined, efficient process. The renovation allowed us to incorporate a laboratory management system. We have an area where the first processing of the evidence starts with us at the computer -- logging, bar-coding the evidence in."

During the renovation, the unit remained operational in the two original rooms that were sealed off from the expansion. While the unit couldn't hold meetings in the room, analysts would take their work into another part of the building to review casework.

"We were lucky last year that in addition to the renovation, we were able to procure three additional new systems," Kennedy said, adding that the unit's partnership with Avid Technologies prepared them for the new platform. "When Avid partnered with Ocean Systems, it was really an ideal partnership for everyone in our unit because we were all Avid-trained already. It was a real natural progression."

Kennedy said that his unit was fortunate that the building had space to expand in and also had the support of the administration.

"We've been very successful in having our agency support us -- which is not the case with a lot of agencies," he said. "Usually in times of budget cuts, the multimedia people are the first people to be looked at. That's not been the case with ours."

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