HSVPOA IT Presentation at Board Retreat

Description

Paul Moore, IT Manager, gave the IT Presentation at the 2021 Hot Springs Village Board Retreat on May 12, 2021. Moore starting working for the POA when he was only 23 and is in his 24th year. Paul was in the IT Department for 13 years and then worked in the Technical Department. He worked on technical issues at the Woodlands, Coronado, and other Village locations. At the end of December 2020, he was asked to come back to IT.

We are talking about the past, present, and future. "I am part of the past and I am trying to be part of the future and the present, of course," said Moore.

"I don't want to talk past. We can talk about it later, after we are done. I don't think it will do any good. I think what I've seen is stuck too much in the past. Yes, we should learn from it. I've mentioned this before to people here, 'I said we must stop the crazy,'" explained the IT Manager.

Moore said, "the definition of 'crazy' is over and over again and expecting different results….I don't want to bring up names. I don't want to bring up past; why this failed; why that didn't work. It would all be speculation and conjecture on my part…Anything I did in the past and I was present for, I will answer for and I can tell you why."

What is IT?

It is difficult to quantify in this day and age. Even our appliances contain IT. Moore said he is always open to questions and ideas. We need to work together. We've seen things happen to the pipeline; we've seen things happen to the water plant in Florida; we've seen how everything is interconnected and if we do not do our due diligence, IT will fail.

The Present

Moore said, "I have been on a five month spelunking mission…"

- The IT Department is in the final phases of converting POA communications from an MPLS

Topology. MPLS is actually a routing protocol (technique). The POA is moving to a new SD-WAN **(Software Defined-WAN)** topology that is now being offered by AT&T. What this means for us is improved speeds. In order to reduce costs, Moore said he started working on this project during the week of Christmas (2020). Director Chris Jones said to think of this like wifi.

- Moore said, "the IT Department, in coordination with all POA departments, began an investigation of real nuts and bolts." Moore asked to see the bills. He said he saw things that needed to be discontinued. "Chris Hogue, POA IT Specialist, did a great job for me and really dug into the cellular bills in order for us to determine what was not needed. We looked at every little 'nickel & diming' charge that companies just love to sneak into the bill." This exercise yielded a $3,461.65 monthly cost reduction. There were redundant costs. This resulted in a yearly savings of $41,539.80.

The Future

AT&T Contract

The current AT&T contract will expire in mid-September, 2023. This contract was signed in 2020. At the time of the contract expiration, Moore will access the available options. "What will it give me? What do I have now? Cost?" These are the things Moore will be considering when the AT&T contract expires.

Wireless Improvements

Goals – it is Moore's goal this year to use wireless technologies to further lower communication costs.

Paul Moore was in POA IT in the beginning. At that time, almost everything was on greenscreen dial-up. The POA did everything in-house and they did "custom, made-for-you" IT work. Moore referred to this as a "**Bespoke Shop.**" Paul built towers and every POA facility was wirelessly connected. "Most everyone was on dial-up at that time, but I was pushing 5 mg, which was a lot, back to the POA building," explained Moore. This was leading-edge technology for the time.

Moore is building on this past knowledge and skill-set. To further lower our cost, he has determined there are ten POA locations that are run on hotspots. Moore plans to have these on wireless hops before the end of the year. This averages to a $50 savings for each location for a total savings of $500 a month. This will cost very little to implement. The ROI is only three months. After the three-month ROI period, this is $6,000 a year savings.

Software Changes

"I came in with zero bias" regarding the currently used software, explained Moore. "**Totally Integrated** is the prominent and most vital software currently used by the POA. This software provides Point-of-Sale, Membership Services, Payments, Billing, Property Management, and Tee Time Reservation bookings, just to name a few. It is the main software that is used by the organization," detailed Moore. Totally Integrated integrates with Microsoft GP (Great Plains}. GP is the accounting software used by the POA.

They are analyzing the performance of all the software used by all the POA departments and

determining alternatives if warranted. The IT department is able to see where the gaps are at, as well.

"It is in the best interest of the organization to always explore options and newly available software. Our current main corporate software, Total E, is absolutely no exception. While it is not financially prudent to chase software in order to have the latest and greatest available, it is important to research alternatives when the currently used software does not provide the features and service that is vital for daily operations."

"With these parameters in mind, we will continually assess Total E's integrated service software capabilities and enhancements."

Moore believes in a prudent approach to software upgrades, but when service, support, and features hinder operations, then it is time for a serious look at alternatives.

Property Owner, Jan Parker, said if Moore determines the software programs are not meeting our needs, that will be a nightmare.

Moore agreed with Jan.

Contracted Services

ClearPointe – based in Little Rock and provides backup services, network monitoring, switch and server management, firewall, and routing management. The POA has used this company since around 2015.

"Concerning the services provided by ClearPointe (or Accountability, which is the same company), the IT Department has taken measures to remove the need for much of the services currently provided. We've done that in the last five months. This includes network monitoring, switch, and server management. Our current AT&T contract provides a router and firewall management and monthly penetration testing, screen testing, DDOS, threat prevention services that we are already contracted for using SD-WAN."

"It is our intentions to reduce charged services provided by ClearPointe when the contract expires or possibly removing all services completely. With the planned reduction of these contracted services, we'll see an annual savings of $70,260."

Moore said he will not need additional staff to cover what ClearPointe was providing.

DataMax – The POA has contracted with DataMax for ten years. This has to do with printer and copier needs. This service will be evaluated to determine if some of this can be provided in-house.

Also, most desks have their own printer. Can printers be consolidated?

Projects

- Member Portal Web Upgrade – to provide Property Owners a more stream-lined online experience and also hopefully some additional features such as pickleball reservation.

Footer Tagline

- Updating credit card processors from Shift Four to Elavon. Elavon is the processor Total E uses. This change has allowed us to get the Portal Member Upgrade at no cost to us.

- Credit card machines are being updated. This will result in faster checkout times in the golf shops.

- The current phone system is antiquated and will be updated this year. We can't get parts for our phone system.

- There are currently 40 POA desktops running Windows 7. The replacements for the desktops have been in POA possession for two years. Another 26 desktops are budgeted for replacement this year. They are working to replace the machines as quickly as possible.

- In the final quarter of 2021, the IT Department will be upgrading existing gate systems, Window server and SQL Databases in order to obtain inter adoptability with current available parts and resources. This is not a budget expense for this year, but the cost for this is less than $1,000. The current gate server is running on a 2003 server and SQL Server is Windows 2000 SQL Server. This change is necessary because the company no longer makes the parts.

- In the future, the IT Department will also be installing security cameras at all POA facilities in an effort to increase security and decrease possible liabilities. We'll also be adding access control at determined locations. Click **here** to see an example of access control.

- Windows Server versions will be upgraded on several servers this year. There are currently eleven servers running Windows Server 2012, Release 2. The end of support life for this is 2023.

- The local backup server currently being used is almost ten years old. Parts are difficult and almost impossible to find for this model. The limit on the hard drive is within 10 percent of the maximum capacity. They are updating this. Budgeted for next year is $30,000 for a backup server.

- Replacement of the gate system – This is possibly being expedited to 2022. We have some of the hardware and software and a lot of the piping and electrical in place. This will help keep the cost down.

Biggest Challenges

Personnel is Moore's biggest problem – people and money. "We are a three-person shop. This morning before 9:00 a.m. we had seven call tickets. We are growing to a size, where it is an impossible task. If one person goes down, it hurts. You've lost a third of your department. We can't keep up at our current rate. We used to do everything in-house. Now we have gone full circle where everything is outsourced. Either we are going to be a Bespoke Shop (in-house) or you are going to farm out everything. Let's take the best of both…If we do not shore it up, I am not disparaging my team…If we don't shore this up, we're going to be stuck with 40 computers downstairs for another year."

In Summation

GM John Paul said that Paul Moore has saved a little over $100,000 this year. He is looking to add an

employee…"If we lose Paul, we've lost everything. We have to get somebody else trained, maybe not that level, but a level close that we can depend on. We are going to be looking for a little added staff in this department and I think we can justify it fairly easily with what he has brought in savings this year."

Finishing up, the IT Manager said, "we give 110%."

By Cheryl Dowden, May 18, 2021

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