

# KENOSHA NEWS

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## Technology improves emergency communication

Alertus System employed at Gateway and Kenosha Medical Center

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Personal safety, especially in schools, institutions and other public places, may never have been such a critical concern as it is today.

News stories on weather-related destruction combined with the rare — but still too-frequent — attack at a public school, university or even a private business have combined to create a feeling of fear.

Two institutions in Kenosha have leveraged technology with systems that provide alerts about destructive weather or other dangers.

Gateway Technical College and United Hospital System's Kenosha Medical Center campus, 6308 Eighth Ave., have deployed the Alertus Alert Beacons and desktop notification systems.

The Alertus Alert Beacon is a wall-mounted device that can be installed almost anywhere. When activated, it produces attention-grabbing bright flashes and loud sounds, and displays a custom message about the nature of the emergency and how to respond.

At the same time, an accompanying desktop notification grabs the attention of users with a full-screen pop-up alert and instructions.

Gateway had already put in place a system that sent emergency text messages and emails to students, faculty and staff.

“In that instance we integrated to extend (protection) to their facilities,” said Erik Eckstrand, director of higher education sales for Alertus.

Gateway has deployed more than 90 alert beacons and desktop notification on 4,300 school computers since introducing the application in 2009.

United Hospital System deploys two Alertus beacons and has desktop notification on 3,000 computers. The medical facility has used the system since 2014.

### Many channels of notification

In this era of increased attention to institutional security, companies like Alertus focus on emergency mass notification with a variety of solutions for unified mass notification. The Alertus System can be implemented anywhere and activated quickly.

For Gateway, a system that worked across multiple buildings on several campuses was a critical need.

Thomas Cousino, director of safety and security for Gateway, said due to the vagaries of cellphone coverage, it can be difficult to reach people inside some buildings on campus. A multi-platform approach is necessary.

“Depending on the cellphone service people have, reception inside buildings (may not be the best),” said Cousino. “We can reach people through about six different methods, whether that's email or pop-ups on Gateway computers, or the use of our beacons. Our hope is to, in some shape or form, reach people with critical emergency alerts.”

With the distance between its campuses — located in Kenosha, Racine and Elkhorn — an alert on one campus may not be relevant on another.

“If we have a tornado warning in Elkhorn, we don't need to let every campus know about that,” Cousino said. “The great thing about the in-building beacons — and desktops — is that we can pinpoint what campus, and even what buildings, where we want to activate the beacons, and with what message.

“If we want people to shelter in place at just the Elkhorn campus, we can send the message to just those beacons or just those specific places.”

“We always tell people to plan for the worst and to hope for the best,” said Eckstrand. “At a minimum, people are notified (of an emergency). People have the opportunity, whether it's an active shooter situation or a weather situation, that they receive a message to shelter in place or to evacuate. Hopefully, they receive that message within 15 to 20 seconds of the activation of the emergency.”

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