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# Crime Victims' Rights Week set

LITTLE VALLEY — The 26th annual commemoration of National Crime Victims' Rights Week will be observed here and across the nation from April 23 to 29, 2006, with the theme "Victims' Rights: Strength in Unity."

Crime victims, and those who serve them, will join together to promote victims' rights and services, and to educate our communities about the devastating impact of crime on victims, neighborhoods, schools, and the nation as a whole. This year's theme pays tribute to crime victims and survivors who, for many decades, have joined together in mutual support, and also recognizes the ongoing efforts of countless victim service providers, justice professionals, and allied professionals and volunteers who selflessly dedicate their lives to helping victims of crime.

During this time, Cattaraugus County Sheriff Dennis B. John said he wants to place emphasis on the VINE program, the New York Sheriffs' Victim Hotline that has been in existence in the county since May 2000.

He said, "Since incorporation in 2000, the VINE program has been underutilized within Cattaraugus County. I encourage all crime victims to take advantage of this service."

The Vine program provides crime victims and other concerned persons with two important services: information and notification. Callers use basic

information about an offender, such as a name or booking number, to search the New York Sheriffs' Victim Hotline database for custody information.

Once an offender is confirmed as in custody, callers may choose to register directly with the service to receive automated telephone notification upon changes in the offender's custody status, such as transfer or release. The Hotline allows victims to access information about the status of their offenders, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. This vital information can help victims make informed choices about their personal safety. There is no charge to the public for locating an offender through the Hotline, registering with the service or receiving a notification call. Callers will also be provided with a listing of available victim services including a brief description and telephone number for each.

A national call center monitors the custody status of offenders, continually searching for custody status changes, stores the updated offender information, and provides it back out to the community through a toll-free number: 1-888-VINE-4-NY (1-888-846-3469).

Many victims live in fear that the criminal offender who victimized them may someday return to do so again. It has often been difficult for a victim to obtain timely and accurate information about an offender's custody status.

Sheriff John said, "The Hotline gives victims a powerful voice in the criminal justice process, and the choice of staying informed and involved. During the 2006 National Crime Victims' Rights Week and throughout the year, the Cattaraugus County Sheriff's Office hopes that the community will join us in helping victims by providing them with information about their rights to victim notification."

To register for notification, call the New York Sheriffs' Victim Hotline at 1-888-VINE-4-NY (1-888-846-3469). VINE is available in English and Spanish, and supported by 24-hour operator assistance. If assistance is needed to register, contact Investigator Nate Root, domestic violence investigator and VINE coordinator at the Sheriff's Office, 938-9191, ext. 2334, and he will register the information "on-line".

The Sheriff's Office is partnered in the VINE program with Cattaraugus Community Action's Victim Services. They may be reached in Salamanca at 945-1041, and Olean at 372-2097.

For additional information about the New York Sheriffs' Victim Hotline in Cattaraugus County, or the 26th anniversary of National Crime Victims' Rights Week, contact the Cattaraugus County Sheriff's Office at (716) 938-9191. //