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Technology upgrades allows crime victims better resources

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VINE system makes it easier to find out when an offender will be released from prison

PLATTSBURGH — Crime victims may rest better at night after recent upgrades to the Victim Notification Hot-line make it easier to be notified when an offender is released from custody.

Technology upgrades to the statewide system now allow anyone to request release notification or search for inmate information online.

TECHNOLOGY UPGRADE

"Certain links and connectivity were not always available to everyone," said Clinton County Sheriff David Favro.

The program technology was upgraded, he said, to ensure that all New Yorkers could have access to the system through home computers without experiencing difficulties with the changing technology.

The New York Sheriffs Association made the computer system more compatible for public access. It now allows victims to search for an offender and follow more simplified directions to receive telephone notification when the person is released back into the community.

"I would highly recommend victims of crime to access this program to start to provide them with a small peace of mind as to the status of their perpetrator," said Favro.

HOW TO SEARCH

To access information on the VINE system Web site, you must be able to provide the offender's full last name, in addition to at least the first two letters of his or her first name. A date of birth can also help narrow the search results but is not necessary.

The new system allows a complete search of the entire state or through a specific Department of Correction facility or county jail.

Online notification is an option in the system, though an e-mail will be sent only once and cannot be confirmed.

The free, 24-hour telephone hot-line is still available as a constant resource to victims.

PUSH FOR CHANGE

The VINE system was enacted in New York state in 1998 as part of Jenna's Law, which provided stiffer parole eligibility requirements for violent felons and also contained a provision that allowed crime victims to request notification about an inmate's release.

Jenna's Law was pushed into legislation by Gov. George Pataki and by Janice and Bruce Grieshaber after their 22-year-old daughter, Jenna, was brutally stabbed and strangled in her Albany apartment by a paroled violent felon.

The Russell Sage College student had not been aware of Nicholas Pryor's violent criminal history when he began stalking her weeks before violently murdering her.

Her parents became the active voice behind the law, urging state legislators to further protect other victims of crime and allow New Yorkers access to the criminal history of violent felons.

'INCREDIBLE'

The VINE system allows any person to search for updated information concerning the status of an offender.

"They can access VINE link from the comfort and security of their own home," Favro said. "This is really an incredible service."

He said that each Sheriff's Department in the state should have a specific VINE program coordinator to keep the department updated with program changes and resources.

It will give Sheriff Department staff more time to handle in-house matters by lessening the number of calls from concerned citizens.

Favro said the system can also benefit local fire departments by allowing formal notification when an arsonist is released back into the community.

"It's the responsibility of law enforcement and corrections to protect victims and provide as much peace of mind as they possibly can. This is another tool to help us complete that obligation."

INMATE RELEASE

To access inmate-release information:

Log onto www.vineline.com and begin an online search or call the free, 24-hour hot-line at 1-888-VINE-4-NY.