

HIGHLANDS TODAY

INFORMING TODAY, SHAPING TOMORROW

System notifies victims of felons' status

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SEBRING, FLA. - The most dangerous time for a person who files for a domestic violence protection order is the hour or two after the injunction is served, according to Highlands County Sheriff's Chief of Staff Lisa Burley.

Now, the sheriff's office is working to bring in another component of the VINE (Victim Information and Notification Everyday) Protective Order to give those victims peace of mind.

"It will notify them immediately once (the offender) has been served," Burley aid.

The sheriff's office will work with the clerk of courts office to get this system up and running, according to Burley. She hopes to meet with them next week.

A review of 2009 data showed that VINE delivered more than 14.1 million notifications, the most in a single year for the service, according to a press release from Appriss, the company that offers the service. VINE is currently contracted to track more than 2 million offenders, or 90 percent of the nation's jail and prison population.

Burley said the sheriff's office has been using the system's victim notification portion since 2007. It notifies crime victims when the offender is getting out of jail, as well as offers year-round status about his or her incarceration.

Since VINE was created in 1994, the system has delivered more than 102 million notifications, the press release stated.

The system also allows local authorities to search a nationwide database for any high-risk offenders of absconders that they're looking for, according to Burley.

This component is called the JusticeXchange system. Sharon Burch, law enforcement analyst for the Highlands County Sheriff's Office, said between 1,200 and 1,500 sheriff's offices across the country take advantage of it.

Burch said the system can also be helpful during a criminal investigation. If a suspect was booked, for example, in a jail in Topeka, Kan., she could look at the booking information and see if they were incarcerated at the time a crime was committed, thus ruling them out as a Highlands County suspect.

That can prove to be a time saver for the sheriff's office.

"We don't have to use any more resources searching or investigating or looking," Burley said.

The JusticeXchange system also contains basic booking information like when a suspect was released and their last known address and phone number, according to Burch.

There are current mug shots that local authorities can compare with past booking photos they have on file.

The program will look for exact and alternate spellings of a suspect's name.

“Nine times out of 10, I'm able to find people through Justice Exchange,” Burch said.

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