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March 16, 2006

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- Local News
- Local Sports
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- Local Columnists
- Obituaries
- Education/Schools
- Opinions
 - Editorials
 - Letters to the Editor
 - Word of Thanks
- Lifestyles
 - Milestones
 - Senior Calendar
 - Social Security
 - Coming UP
 - In the Tri-State
 - What's Happening
- AP Wire
 - Nation/State News
 - AP Sports
 - AP Business
 - Financial News
- Archives

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ADVERTISING

- Today's Classifieds
- Help Wanted
- Real Estate
- Transportation
- Place a Classified
- Advertising Rates

COMMUNITY

- Entertainment
- Crossword Puzzle
- Local Links
 - Lotteries
 - Road Conditions
 - CNHI
- Newspapers in Education
- Sales Locator

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- Online Forms
 - Weddings

News

Escape hotline notifies residents

By Allen Blair - The Independent

Posted: 01/30/06 - 12:05:30 am EST

SANDY HOOK - Who you gonna call, if you're worried about a prison escape?

Well, don't call the Kentucky Department of Corrections. They'll call you, using a newly-enhanced statewide escape notification service.

"It's really great," said Gary Beckstrom, warden at the 971-bed Little Sandy Correctional Complex near Sandy Hook.

"There's an 800 number, and anybody in the community worried about an escape can call that and register," Beckstrom said.

If there's an escape, then the prison reports the information, and that information is passed on by automatic calls to the people who registered.

Information includes not only the time of the escape and other information, but a description as well, the warden said.

"I've been in this 29 years, and years and years ago we used to collect phone numbers from people and it would take five people three hours to do it," he said. "It's one of the advances in technology that really fits our usage really well."

Beckstrom has been getting word out about the system since last fall, visiting Elliott and Carter county local governments.

The Department of Corrections had announced its enhancements then, unveiling a partnership with Louisville-based Appriss Inc. that developed the state's VINE system that notifies victims when someone is released from prison.

The escape notification system, AlertXpress, allows individuals who live near Kentucky's 13 state prisons and three private prisons to hear detailed information about the inmate in the event of an escape from that institution. When the escape notification system was launched in 2004, residents only heard a recorded message informing them of the date and time of the escape.

Now those registered will know exactly who escaped, including a description of the inmate and their charges.

Residents call a toll-free number, (866) 445-2867, to register. (All those previously registered will be "rolled over" by Appriss onto the enhanced system.) Residents can register as many numbers as they wish - for instance, a home telephone, a cell phone number and a work number.

The enhanced notification system also calls registered individuals when the escapee is back in custody.

"This enhanced escape notification plan is a continuation of our plan towards ensuring the safety of residents of the commonwealth and carrying out the mission of not only the Department of Corrections, but the Justice and Public

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Corrections

Safety Cabinet as well," said Corrections Commissioner John D. Rees. "We work diligently to make our prisons safe and secure and want to do everything in our power to make the residents who live near our prisons feel as safe as possible."

Prisons get a benefit, too, Beckstrom added.

With everyone notified, especially with descriptions of an escapee, there are lots more eyes and ears out there who might find the missing inmate, he said.

ALLEN BLAIR can be reached at ablair@dailyindependent.com

or (606) 326-2657.
