

## Douglas implements crime victim notification program

MARCH 1 2011

BY SHEILA GARDNER

SGARDNER@RECORDCOURIER.COM

The Douglas County Sheriff's Office has implemented a nationwide notification program designed to give crime victims information as to the status and whereabouts of an offender.

Sheriff Ron Pierini, officials from the Nevada Attorney General's Office, and the consultant who created the program, conducted a training session Feb. 23 for Victim Information and Notification Everyday.

"This makes sure information is available to each victim to know the whereabouts of the defendant 24 hours a day, seven days a week," Pierini said.

"We get a huge amount of phone calls from people who want to know the status of offenders in our jail," Pierini said. "We don't have the luxury of one person dedicated to make these calls."

"VINE is more of a time advantage for us. In addition, once the information is entered, it is very accurate. There is less chance of human error — by that I mean if we were supposed to call the victim, and somehow it slips through the crack and the victim isn't notified. This way, the victim takes the initiative to get the information," Pierini said.

VINE communicates with the Douglas County Jail book system in near real-time, transmitting updated information to the Appriss Data Network.

Crime victims and the general public can access the information by calling a local toll-free number, or logging onto [www.vinelink.com](http://www.vinelink.com).

Victims can inquire whether an offender is held in jail and the facility's location.

Users — which can be anyone — can register to be notified immediately of a change in the offender's status, such as release, transfer or escape.



**Renee Hughes, a former Louisville, Ky., police officer, leads a training session Feb. 23 at the Douglas County Sheriff's Office for the Victim Information Notification Everyday automated system.**

When a notification is triggered, VINE automatically calls the number or numbers the victim has provided.

Calls continue for a designated period of time or until the victim enters a four-digit personal identification number.

Live operators are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week to assist victims who need help. The service is free and anonymous.

Renee Hughes, a former Louisville, Ky., police officer, lead the training.

She is a learning specialist for Appriss, based in Louisville.

"VINE's most critical role is that it delivers information to victims on their own terms," she said. "It's anonymous. Offenders don't know who is registered. There is no limit to the number of calls"

"Anybody can use it for any reason. It's public information. It doesn't matter what the crime is, if somebody's in jail."

Nationwide, Hughes said, the service proves popular, for example, when celebrities like Charlie Sheen or Lindsay Lohan are taken into custody.

"When Paris Hilton got arrested, we had 300 registrations for her information. That was much more than her family," Hughes said.

The service is available in Douglas County in Spanish and English. Arrangements can be made for interpreters in other languages.

Tahoe Township Justice of the Peace Richard Glasson, who attended the training, said the system will be invaluable.

“Nevada justice courts come into contact with victims of crime on a daily basis. With the addition of this automated information system, our witnesses, victims, and their families can be assured that they will get accurate and timely notification of the release of persons that could pose a very credible threat to their safety and well-being,” Glasson said.

“This system can provide both peace of mind and an incentive for the victim to seek and obtain an appropriate order of protection from the court and the assistance of law enforcement,” he said.

Glasson said VINE helps protect victims’ rights.

“It is important to remember that the accused is not the only person who has constitutional rights. Victims have rights as well, including the right to be informed of the status and disposition of criminal proceedings,” Glasson said.

“Knowledge is power, but information is only power if it is shared and is accessible. VINE is extremely user friendly, accurate and fast. I am very impressed with this system. The Douglas County Sheriff’s Office has done a wonderful job of getting this program on line so quickly,” he said.

Nevada counties on the system include Washoe, Clark and North Las Vegas Detention Center on their own systems.

The statewide system includes Douglas, Esmeralda and Lyon counties. Humboldt and Elko counties are testing VINE and should be on with two to three weeks.

“Douglas County is one of the first to kick VINE off in smaller rural areas,” Pierini said. “I am glad they selected us. They were very pleased with our staff.”

The statewide system is provided by the Nevada Office of the Attorney General by a grant from the U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance.

ON THE WEB  
Nevada VINE  
[www.vinelink.com](http://www.vinelink.com)  
Toll-free number  
(888) 268-8463

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How do users register?

Most users register by calling the VINE toll-free number in their area or by visiting [www.vinelink.com](http://www.vinelink.com). Requirements for registration are explained during the call-in and on the Web site. Some knowledge specific to the offender or case is usually required. Some agencies may have special requirements regarding registration.

Does VINE monitor all offenders?

VINE monitors the custody or case status of offenders housed in (or handled by) participating criminal justice agencies.

Who can use the VINE service? n Crime victims

- Family members and friends of crime victims
- Victim advocates and victim service providers
- Law enforcement and criminal justice staff
- Anyone concerned about the custody of an offender

What should crime victims know about VINE?

- All telephone calls and registrations are free, anonymous and confidential.
- VINE is a service available to assist the victims in determining the custody status of an offender.
- Do not depend solely on the VINE service for protection; make it part of your safety plan.