



Monday,
July 21, 2003

NO. 1 IN THE USA

States aid victims in tracking criminals

Database provides updates, comfort

By Patrick McMahon
USA TODAY

Crime victims in an increasing number of states are getting help dealing with one of their biggest concerns: knowing the whereabouts of burglars, rapists and other offenders who terrorized them and their families.

Florida announced last week that it is expanding a notification system that allows victims to keep track of criminals until their release from prison. Texas is beginning an effort to allow victims to track inmates in county jails as well as state prisons. Utah will announce such a plan this week. They are the 16th, 17th and 18th states to implement the Victim Information and Notification Everyday (VINE) system statewide. It is available in parts of 18 other states.

"I can't tell you how important this is," says Sharon D'Eusanio of Boca Raton, Fla., who was stabbed, raped and left for dead in 1980 and is blind as a result of it. "Too often, victims have no idea what is happening."

The VINE system is the latest effort in a movement begun in the 1960s by local officials, states and the federal government to focus on and help the often-forgotten victims of serious crimes.

VINE is a privately run database that has a toll-free telephone number for each state in which it operates as well as a nationwide number for information (1-800-816-0491).

VINE provides information that is updated daily on people who are charged and convicted of serious crimes. It tells of court proceedings and gives notification of a prisoner's transfer, parole hearings and release. In most states, anyone can use it. States pay \$100,000 to \$1 million a year to participate, based on inmate population.



By Colin J. Mulvany

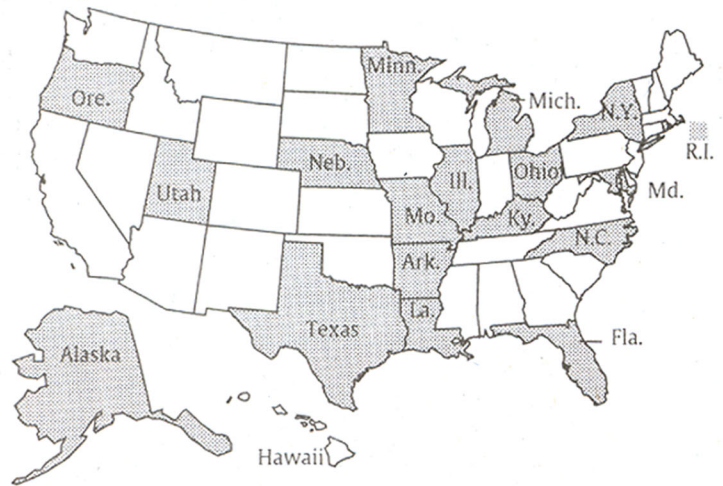
Ellison: "I still have nightmares."

Statewide coverage

18 states fully embrace the tracking system. Map, 3A

Statewide system tracks criminals

The Victim Information and Notification Everyday system notifies crime victims of changes in an offender's status or location. With the addition of Florida, Texas and Utah, 18 states will implement the system statewide (Story, 1A):



Source: Appriss Inc.

By Robert W. Ahrens, USA TODAY

Brandi Ellison, a cosmetics saleswoman in Moscow, Idaho, was stalked and brutally beaten in 1999. She says an occasional late-night phone call to VINE reassures her. "I still have nightmares at night, but at least I don't wake up anymore," Ellison, 28, says.

► In New York, VINE reports that David Berkowitz, the "Son of Sam" killer of the late 1970s, is at Sullivan Correctional Facility in Fallsburg. The earliest he could be released is June 28, 2004.

► In Florida, Nathaniel Brazill, who was convicted in 2001 at age 14 of murdering his teacher, is serving a 28-year sentence at Hillsborough Correction Institution near Tampa. The earliest he could be out is May 18, 2028.

"On any given day, about 60% of inmates in county jails and state prisons are on our system," says Mike Davis, co-founder of the VINE system and president of Appriss Inc. of Louisville, a private company that operates the system and sells it to states.

"What we'd like to see is the federal government recognize the importance of this and help us build a system that includes the last 40% of the country," Davis says. States with VINE still face the challenge of spreading the word about it. "This is a new program," Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan says. "But as more people become familiar with it, we are having a tremendous response."