

## **Brown County joins Wisconsin Victim Information and Notification Everyday system**

### **It alerts victims to offender transfers, bond postings, escapes**

Brown County has a new automated system that notifies victims when a jail inmate connected to their case is released.

The Wisconsin Victim Information and Notification Everyday system, or WI-VINE, connects to the county's booking system. It alerts registered users when an offender transfers facilities, posts bond or escapes.

"It's been a long time coming," Brown County Sheriff John Gossage said Friday of the service provided by Louisville, Ky.-based company Appriss during a news conference at the department's Bellevue office. Gossage said the free notifications allow victims to take special precautions, such as staying with relatives or monitoring their travel routes.

"I can't say that it's going to save lives, but I can tell you one thing: It's going to bring resolve to victims."

People must know an offender's name to register a phone number or email address to receive the notifications. The system updates every 15 minutes, said Jo Winston, director of victim services and programs for the Wisconsin Department of Corrections.

"It's really a public safety tool for victims of crimes or anyone who wants to know the status of an offender in a county jail," she said.

Brown County Jail security Lt. Phil Steffen said the service is also useful for officers.

"Law enforcement receives threats as well, so it's nice to know when someone is released from a facility," he said.

Winston said the service calls a registered number every 30 minutes for up to 48 hours until someone answers. Recipients of the calls then must enter a 4-digit personal identification number.

The service will send alerts if an offender is arrested within 14 days of release. Notifications also are sent if a suspect is jailed within 90 days of posting bond.

The system, which began operating in Brown County in late September, has been activated in 54 of Wisconsin's 72 counties, and all counties have agreed to participate in the program, Winston said. It operates in most states.

A separate system called VOICE for Victims, which does not offer an open registration, sends alerts concerning Wisconsin state prisoners.

WI-VINE was funded by a \$1.2 million grant from the Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Assistance in 2007. Implementation began in 2009, Winston said.

The service has operated in Dane County since 1999, and in Outagamie County since 2000. Milwaukee County began using the service earlier this year. It is being installed in Racine County.

Winston said it will cost about \$576,000 annually for the program to operate statewide. That fee is expected to be funded through a surcharge on civil cases.

The VINE system was created after the 1993 death of Mary Byron, who was fatally shot on her 21st birthday by a former boyfriend in Louisville, Ky. The man had earlier been arrested on suspicion of raping, assaulting and stalking Byron, and was released after his bond was posted. Byron was never notified.

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