

Jackson County Chronicle

Published - Friday, November 19, 2010

by Cassandra Colson | Reporter

Area residents now can check on the custody status of Jackson County Jail inmates with the county's recent launch of the Wisconsin Victim Information and Notification Everyday service.

"We're thrilled, and we're very excited," said Pamela Brandon, WI-VINE program manager with the Department of Corrections. "It provides great comfort and a sense of security, and it's important for (victims) to be in control of their circumstances and take action if they need to know if someone's being released.

"In that sense, we're feeling great."

As of two weeks ago, Jackson County was one of 32 counties in the state with active service. The county began the implementation process last year and officially launched the program at the end of October. WI-VINE allows anyone who wants information about a particular offender's custody status to search for that information either online or by telephone.

People also can register with the program to receive telephone or e-mail updates when an offender's status changes in a county's booking system. Appriss, the company that provides the VINE service, interfaces with a county's booking system every 15 minutes to determine any changes in offenders' statuses.

"I think it's important that the victims are notified in a prompt and timely manner," said Capt. Mike Ring, Jackson County Jail administrator.

"I think it's going to be a valuable asset any time we can increase the flow of information."

If a status changes, the system will search for anyone who wants to receive updates about that offender and either place a telephone call or e-mail to the person immediately.

Brandon previously said the custody status changes provided by the program vary across booking systems. The types of information provided may include an offender being released, an escape, a return from escape, return to custody, death, unsupervised custody, transfer or a scheduled release.

"Protecting the citizens of Jackson County is always our highest priority," said Sheriff Duane Waldera in a statement. "The WI-VINE service provides an added level of protection because it gives everyone access to timely and accurate information on offenders in our county and other counties throughout the state that offer the WI-VINE service.

"Our department is appreciative of the support we receive locally in order to participate in this grant and are delighted that we could make this important service available to the public."

In 2007, the DOC was awarded a \$1.2 million Statewide Automated Victim Information and Notification grant from the U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance. Brandon said that grant, originally slated to expire in October, was extended through June 2011.

The DOC has made a budget request for the program to be fully funded in all 72 Wisconsin counties annually.

"We believe it's important for the state to continue to support county jails when this grant ends," she said.

Brandon said two more counties are in the final process of launching the service, and a total of 60 will be up and running by the end of the month. She said there have been more than 3,000 registrations and nearly 2,000 notifications with the service statewide.

"We're thrilled — we're absolutely thrilled," she said. "We're seeing good utilization.

"We get a lot of good anecdotal feedback from counties for how much they appreciate it."

The event that precipitated the initiation of victim information and notification systems was the 1993 murder of a Kentucky woman who was told, along with her family, they would be notified by the sheriff's department when her ex-boyfriend was released from jail. They weren't, and he stalked her for three days before murdering her on her birthday.

The family garnered financial and political support and eventually saw the initiation of the program, which since has expanded to other counties and states.

Brandon noted the findings of the 2009 Wisconsin Domestic Violence Homicide report, which found there were 47 domestic violence homicide incidents that resulted in 67 deaths through homicide and suicide. VINE is a system that could address some of these incidents, she said.

"This is the kind of system that would work, in part, to address some of

those concerns when someone has a domestic violence incident and somebody is taken into custody.

“It gives (victims) a way to try to protect themselves.”

To search for and track offenders in the Jackson County Jail, visit www.vinelink.com or call (888) 944-8463. Operators are available for assistance 24 hours a day, seven days a week by calling the same number.