

## Garfield County sheriff improves capabilities with high-tech programs

Free phone service helps victims know status of offender

[JOHN COLSON](#)

POST INDEPENDENT STAFF

GLENWOOD SPRINGS, CO COLORADO,

Garfield County Sheriff Lou Vallario has two new programs to add to his growing arsenal of high-tech, crime-fighting measures.

One is a new computer system, called a “forensic recovery of evidence device,” or FRED for short, to improve investigators' efforts to deal with computer crimes.

For slightly more than \$71,400, the sheriff's office is about to buy equipment dedicated to “a field that's growing exponentially” along with society's increased reliance on computers for everything from commerce to crime, Vallario told the Board of County Commissioners on March 1.

Vallario said his department has typically waited for up to a year for the Colorado Bureau of Investigation to analyze computer evidence turned in from a crime scene, thanks to a backlog in the case load.

With the FRED equipment, said Vallario and Detective Cpl. Eric Ashworth, the county will be able to do its own forensic work and provide the same kind of assistance to other Western Slope jurisdictions.

As an example of the county's need for the equipment, Ashworth told of a recent case of child pornography in which some 1,400 computer images were recovered, along with evidence of hundreds of sales of those images.

He said the case led to federal charges and deportation of an unspecified number of defendants.

In a New Castle case, Ashworth said, investigators were able to recover more than 150 images of acts of statutory rape, taken while the acts were being committed.

Vallario said the FRED equipment will allow his investigators to “tap into any type of phones, computers [and other digital devices] to recover the evidence we've been talking about.”

Purchase of the FRED equipment was approved unanimously by the county commissioners.

The second new program for the sheriff is a free telephone service, called Victim Information and Notification Everyday, or VINE, that allows crime victims to follow a criminal's progress through the courts and, in cases where a jail sentence is handed down, to learn what the convicted criminal's release date is.

In fact, the service will automatically make a “notification call” that alerts the victim of a pending general release, an escape, a release on bond or a court order, or the granting of parole.

The information provided includes the name of the offender, the offender's current custody status and location, a scheduled release date, and more, according to Vallario's presentation.

A brochure, handed out by Vallario during the March 1 county commissioners meeting, describes the service as “providing crime victims peace of mind through knowing the status of their offender.”

The service is free to the county thanks to funding by the County Sheriffs of Colorado association.

[jcolson@postindependent.com](mailto:jcolson@postindependent.com)

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