

## **New system will ease tracking of offenders**

### **Notifications will be sent to victims within 15 minutes**

**By Lisa Ryckman, Rocky Mountain News (Contact)**

**Thursday, January 10, 2008**

From the moment they found her daughter's body, Sherry Lee Burt believed they would find her killer, too.

She has held fast to that belief every minute for nearly 38 years.

"You don't quit looking," Burt said. "I know eventually, I'll get him."

Not an hour goes by that she doesn't think about 15-year-old Marilee, a cheerleader snatched off a Littleton street on her way home from a school basketball game on Feb. 26, 1970.

The blond teenager was raped, strangled and left under a bridge in Deer Creek Canyon in Jefferson County, where workmen found her body the next day.

On Wednesday, Burt stood with a group of county sheriffs to unveil a free automated system to enable crime victims and their families to track offenders by phone or online.

As a victims' advocate, she will help oversee Victim Information and Notification Everyday (VINE), which will monitor the state's prisons and jails. When offenders are transferred, released or escape, VINE notifies victims who register with the system within 15 minutes by phone, e-mail or pager.

"This will make sure that victims don't fall through the cracks," said Boulder County Sheriff Joe Pelle, who helped obtain the \$430,000 Bureau of Justice grant to put VINE in place.

County sheriffs have been required for years to notify victims about the status of offenders, but their efforts have been hampered by a lack of funds, personnel and up-to-date technology.

With more than 200,000 crime victims in Colorado, the system has been overwhelmed and inadequate, said Don Christensen, executive director of County Sheriffs of Colorado. VINE, already in use in Denver and more than 30 states, will change that.

"They won't be surprised by a perpetrator showing up on their doorstep," he said of victims. "They will know the status of that person. They won't have to worry about, is he out, or isn't he?"

including police, who don't currently have access to statewide jail information - to track offenders in the system, Pelle said. Denver has used VINE for about seven years.

Counties will be brought into the VINE system every month for the next two years, starting this month with Adams and Arapahoe, where Marilee Burt's murder remains an open case.

Sherry Lee Burt had driven to Goddard Middle School to pick up her daughter that chilly winter night but missed her. Marilee was last seen talking to someone in a van on South Middlefield Road.

"It was just total devastation for an awfully long time," Burt said. Other people didn't understand her pain; how could they? But when she walked into a meeting of Parents of Murdered Children, "I knew I was home."

For years, Burt has attended other criminal trials and held the hands of other victims' families. She has become close friends with Dorothy Moxley, mother of 15-year-old Martha Moxley, whose Connecticut murder went unsolved for nearly 27 years before Michael Skakel was convicted in her death.

She heads the board of directors at the nonprofit Families of Homicide Victims & Missing Persons, whose members expect a day will come when they find out who killed the person they loved. The group sums up its motivation with this line: "Someone is getting away with murder."

"All of us are cold cases," Burt said. "But you never quit hoping. It's the hope that keeps us going."



Ken Papaleo / The Rocky

Sherry Lee Burt, photographed in her apartment Wednesday, says after nearly 38 years she still believes the person who killed her 15-year-old daughter, Marilee, will be found.



Burt Family Photo

Marilee Burt, was raped and strangled in 1970.