

## **New technology will inform victims of inmate status**

*Written by Jackie Schlotfeldt*

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A new automated statewide booking system will soon be up and running at the Socorro County Detention Center. The new system will allow for faster booking of inmates, and also quicker notification to victims of crimes in changes to the status of those who are incarcerated.

The program — Victim Information and Notification Everyday, or VINE, is an automated hotline available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year and provides vital information that includes the custody status of inmates, where they are incarcerated, if they have been released, parole eligibility dates, court dates and sentencing information. The agency contracted to provide the automated notification service is Appriss Inc., located in Louisville, Ky.

"This is something that will be really good for us," Socorro Jail Administrator Evangel Maldonado said. "We've wanted this for a long time and we're finally going to get it."

Kevin Ann Cary, Vine Program administrator from the Administrative Office of the District Attorneys, outlined the program before the Socorro County Commission on Tuesday, Feb. 9.

Cary said the automated victim notification program was made available through a two-year federal grant from the Bureau of Justice Assistance. She went on to say their office has already applied for another two-year grant that, if awarded, would cover the cost of the program.

"It appears there will be funding," Cary said.

Although there is no cost to the county at this time, County Manager Delilah Walsh said if the county needs to pick up any licensing costs for the program if no further grant is awarded, they are prepared to do that and will budget for it if necessary.

Currently, the detention center is using a manual booking process that requires a lot of time and paperwork. Maldonado said the detention center also uses a digital camera for booking photos, which then requires them to print out the photos to accompany the paperwork for each individual that is booked. The new automated system will free up time and mug shots can be taken and quickly attached to the automated inmate files.

"Right now we have a book this thick," Maldonado said, spreading his hands wide, demonstrating the size of their books. "It takes a while to look up records manually for people inquiring on the status of an inmate."

The new computer hardware and software was installed at the detention center on Wednesday, Feb. 10. However, the system in Socorro County will not be fully online until late summer Cary said.

"We will have all the jails up and running in the state by December," Cary said. But, the good news is, the detention center can begin using the program immediately to speed up

the booking process and, once online, the information will be available for those who call to inquire about an inmate's status.

"Even if you are not a victim, you can get information (regarding the status of someone incarcerated)," Cary explained. "Within 15 minutes of input (of any change to an inmates status) into VINE, calls are made to those victims required to receive notification."

Cary said they hope to be able to notify victims through text messaging, in addition to phone calls, sometime next year. Eventually, the system will be tied to the courts and will also help provide immediate information regarding court dates and sentencing as well as to which facility an individual convicted of a crime will be sent.

"Everything has to be up by June 2011," Cary said. "That includes the jails, courts, prisons and tribal jails."

For victims, Cary said, having access to this type of information quickly impacts them in a variety of ways.

"One little girl calls every night to see if the person who hurt her is still in jail," Cary said softly. "They say 'yes' and she can sleep through the night."

Maldonado said he believes this system is something the county needs and he and his staff are very excited to get the system online.

"It will be a real benefit for us," he said.

New Mexico is the 41st state to implement the program statewide.

The toll-free VINE number to call for information on incarcerated individuals is 800-510-0415. However, information will not be available for Socorro County until the system comes online in late August or September.

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