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Crime-mapping system allows residents to watch neighborhoods

By Nick Hiltunen
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A local business that offers cutting-edge mapping technology is helping lawmen in Goldsboro and Wayne County plot a detailed map that helps them track criminal activity.

Geographic Technologies Group, using specialized data collected by local officials, is able to pinpoint the location of crime scenes, suspects' locations, registered sex offenders and other vital information far more accurately than most simple global positioning systems.



NEWS-ARGUS/MICHAEL BETTS

Geographic Technologies Group owner Curt Hinton, left, and systems specialist Donald Lee watch as software applications developer Nicholas Gosselin pulls up a crime data map using the MapNimbus Web site.

Its owner, Curt Hinton, is working with the county to create a countywide map that will help authorities respond faster to reported crimes and even help determine patterns in criminal activity.

Wayne County Sheriff Carey Winders said such advanced crime-mapping abilities will enable his officers and those of the Goldsboro Police Department and other law enforcement agencies to gain a better insight into how and where crimes occur in the county. And that, Winders said, could lead to the prevention of some of that activity.

"For several years, we have been looking at crime mapping, and the problem that we have been having, is we (would have) had to hire someone to ... input data, which is very time-consuming, and not cost-effective. We didn't have the manpower to do that," Winders said.

With Hinton's company's MapNimbus software, that point becomes moot, the sheriff said.

"With the new technology that they've developed, they are able to pull this data directly from our server," he said.

And there should be no significant gaps in coverage. Winders said he arranged with every municipal police department, including Fremont, Mount Olive and Pikeville, to sign on to the program and to have their information linked together.

When he first saw the program's capabilities, the sheriff said he knew a patchwork of information would not do.

"When I met with (Hinton) I said, we really need everybody on board," Winders said.

Other municipalities' police departments all signed an agreement that they would participate in this program.

"We can now look what happened not just in Goldsboro, but outside of Goldsboro, and see if there are any related crimes," Winders said. "We know crime mapping is a very valuable tool, especially as an investigative tool."

Getting the county's smaller towns together was a natural extension of the proprietary "Pistol" law enforcement software that Winders counts as one of his major accomplishments.

"In (the years before Pistol), everybody had a little bit of something different. Everybody had their own standalone servers," he said. "This way, we had the one server and had everybody grouped on that."

The software will have two entranceways -- one for the general public, and one for law enforcement only.

Making the information available to the public is an important part of the program, both lawmen and Hinton said. Residents want to know where crime is occurring and they have that right, law enforcement officials said. Internet users who visit www.mapnimbus.com can get access to precise information about where crimes have been reported.

Hinton's company is already performing similar crime-mapping duties for hundreds of other clients outside Wayne and he noted that access to crime location information is a common public demand.

"That's what brought this on, is the desire by people, the agencies ... wanting to start sharing this data with the public," Hinton said.

Goldsboro police Chief Tim Bell said the program is a step in the right direction.

"It'll help get the community more connected with the police department and with their neighbors," Bell said. "It just lets people know what's going on around them."

Some people, the chief has noticed, believe that police departments can be overly secretive.

"It's another way for us to be a little bit more transparent," Bell said. "At times, people think police have a whole lot to hide. I think we're just finally catching up to serve our customers, which just happens to be our citizens."

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