

Modern crime lab looks to computer for help

By Casey Hans
staff writer

Fingerprint analysis still requires a keen eye, but today's crime lab has introduced another tool: the computer.

Police departments can now take advantage of AFIS, the statewide, computerized Automated Fingerprint Identification System at 15 different agencies throughout Michigan.

Since its introduction last year, the Oakland County Sheriff's Department has a lab up and running at the city of Southfield and will have another operating at the county complex in Pontiac by month's end.

"Right now, we'll search for anything," although a murder is more likely than a larceny to get priority, said John Satawa, a crime lab specialist for the county who works at the Southfield location.

He demonstrated the system last

week for officials of the Farmington Hills Police Department, and is busy setting up appointments for other departments to show them how AFIS works.

MICHIGAN'S AFIS system uses products developed by the Nissan Electronic Corp., which scans a fingerprint and matches it with more than 750,000 prints in the centralized computer system. Although a search for five or 10 suspects is most common, Satawa said the system can search for up to 250 suspects, or matches.

The state is divided into seven AFIS regions, allowing the crime lab specialists to search the entire state or specific areas. Eventually, Satawa said, the Michigan system could be linked to other AFIS systems across the country. "We have to crawl before we walk," he added. AFIS checks for prints made by any 10 fingers; it cannot check for

palm prints. It shows how many points of comparison, or how unique the print is. It allows technicians to "clean up" the print using the computer before it is sent, via computer, to Lansing.

The system also allows law enforcement officials to check a print to determine if someone arrested is using a false name — something police estimate happens more than 30 percent of the time.

ONE OF the things Satawa is suggesting area agencies do is to process and send in all prints found at the scene. Fingerprinting those who are regularly at the scene allows those prints to be eliminated from the investigation.

For example, if a house is robbed, he suggests the homeowners' prints and even those of the officer be taken to make it easier to narrow the prints to those of the suspect.

Even if there's a doubt, Satawa

suggests departments give AFIS a try anyway. "You start with nothing, end with nothing and you have nothing. What I say is, you have nothing to lose," he said. "You never know when you'll get a hit."

The AFIS program in Oakland has been underwritten by the county, so there will be no fee to local governmental agencies using it.

In addition to two Oakland County labs, other agencies that currently

have AFIS computers include: Dearborn, Detroit, Livonia, Taylor, Flint, Southfield (working in conjunction with Oakland County), Grand Rapids and seven state police posts, including Northville.

Fingerprinting system lauded

Continued from Page 1

tions because of the detail work done by the department. One-third of the city's department is trained in evidence-gathering and makes the effort on each felony case to dust for fingerprints. In many larger departments, there is not enough time to handle each case in such detail, he said.

"We're one of a select few departments that actually go to a felony and dust for prints," he said. "All residential B & Es (breaking and en-

tering cases) we send an evidence technician to. It's something they really get into. It's going to be a major help in that area."

"We're going to have the evidence to submit to AFIS."

Farmington is just getting information about the system, and how the department will submit information for AFIS.

IN FARMINGTON HILLS, police are also getting acquainted with the system and deciding which old cases

— and future ones — can benefit from AFIS.

Inspector Thomas Godwin and Sgt. Chuck Nebus got a firsthand look at one of two Oakland County AFIS labs this week, at one based in the Southfield Police Department.

Nebus and Godwin said they would meet with their detectives and others to discuss the new system, and possibly send some detectives and evidence technicians to Southfield to view the system and how it operates

New Vision calls on Grace & Wild to create video

With help from a Farmington Hills firm, New Vision Communications of Detroit announced a video to promote the launch of a pilot Youth Assistance Program for children of UAW-Chrysler employees, sponsored by the UAW-Chrysler National Training Center in Detroit.

Clarence Williams, president of New Vision and producer of the program, called on Grace & Wild Studios in Farmington Hills to create an upbeat, MTV feel to the video

through its computer graphics and video editing capabilities.

Designed to encourage youngsters to get involved in several workshops offered by the training center, the video features testimonials from children who have participated in the Youth Assistance Program, and footage of the workshops in progress.

Grace & Wild's computer graphics were used to create a pulsating, neon glow around the speakers in the testimonial sections of the video, with

the live action footage and graphics then edited together at the facility. "We wanted to get the kids excited about the new program and inform them of the various workshops that are available," Williams said.

The NTC Youth Assistance pilot program has proven to be such a success, plans for similar programs are being developed at six other UAW-Chrysler regional training centers.

Joan Patterson, co-director of the

National Training Center in Detroit said: "We want to develop and motivate our youth so they can look forward to a productive and rewarding future."

New Vision Communications is a full-service communications firm specializing in video presentation and print development for corporate and commercial clients. It has worked with the UAW-Chrysler National Training Center on several programs.

Grace & Wild Studios is a full-service production and post production facility offering studio and remote production, film transfer, computer graphics and videotape editing ser-

vices. The facility is in Studio Center, one of the Midwest's largest communications production complexes, in Farmington Hills.

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