Criminals’ information revealed

By Ali Cheeseman

Delaware State News DOVER — Crime victims can breathe a little bit easier now that they can track offenders at all times through the justice system in Delaware.

With the state’s new program, Victims Information and Notification Everyday, or VINE, victims can receive real-time information about custody status of inmates any time of day, by phone or Internet.

State officials unveiled the system Tuesday at the Delaware State Police Museum in Dover with featured guest Debra Puglisi Sharp, who was the first to register for the program. In April 1998, when Mrs. Sharp was living near Newark, she was working in her rose garden when local factory worker Donald Flagg entered her home, shot and killed her husband Nino Puglisi, raped and kidnapped her. For five days she was hog-tied in the captor’s home off U.S. 40 until she was able to escape her bonds and dial 911. “In my case I was attacked in a place where every American should feel safe,” she said Tuesday. “I could not imagine a victim’s fear or helplessness to know that the offender was free.”

Ten years after her tragedy and now living in Millsboro, Mrs. Sharp travels the country sharing her story to encourage other victims, while her abductor is serving 10 life sentences at the James T. Vaughn Correctional Center near Smyrna. But she said she is comforted that she can check if Flagg’s custody status ever changes with the VINE program.

“Too many of our victims lie in bed at night, wondering if their offender is still locked up,” said state Homeland Security Secretary David B. Mitchell. “This system allows any victim to pick up the phone 24 hours a day and make sure that person is still behind bars.”

Registration in the notification system is free and anonymous, Ms. Wilson said, and anyone concerned with an inmate’s status is encouraged to take advantage of it either by phone or Internet. Victims and concerned citizens can access the service by calling (877) DE8-VINE or www.vinelink.com and will need at least the inmate’s last name and first initial or date of birth. Alerts can be sent either by phone or e-mail if the status of the inmate changes.

“Being more informed always makes people feel safer,” said Gov. Ruth Ann Minner. “There is so much more than simply knowing someone is in custody. It’s knowing where they are 24 hours a day. It’s also about reducing that fear and making sure (victims) move forward with their lives in stead of dwelling on what happened to them.”

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