

De Queen Bee & De Queen Daily Citizen

Lions Hear Program On Victim Information

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Stephanie Rector, Susan Bradshaw and Teri Hart presented a program on the Victim Information and Notification Everyday program for members of the De Queen Lions Club recently.

DE QUEEN — The Victim Information and Notification Everyday program, commonly known as VINE, was the Lions Club topic at the Palace Restaurant, noon Tuesday, Sept. 7. Lion Teri Hart, who has personal experience with the program because of a family tragedy in 1987, introduced Stephanie Rector and Susan Bradshaw of the organization.

Hart told the Lions Club that VINE has kept her informed concerning the status of her nephew, a prisoner found guilty in the 1987 murder of brother and his family in Ashdown.

According to Bradshaw, VINE is a fully automated service that immediately notifies registered users upon a change in an offender's status. VINE can relay important custody, court or arrest information in a matter of minutes anywhere in the United States via telephone, pager, e-mail, fax or letter, through the national VINE Communication Center.

Bradshaw told the Lions Club that the first VINE program was unveiled in Kentucky, in December 1994. Today, VINE serves 36 states, accounting for 60 percent of county jail beds nationwide; 27 state departments of correction; and the U.S. Department of Justice.

VINE electronically links a national communications center to the custody information housed in local jails or state prisons. The process works like this:

- Custody and court information is gathered by the center.
- VINE compares the offender and case information to the list of registered users.
- When it finds a match, VINE immediately places a call to the registered user notifying them of the change in custody or case status.

VINE can also provide court information if connected to the prosecutor or district attorney's on-site case management system.

Most users register by calling the VINE toll-free telephone number: 1-800-510-0415. Requirements for registration are explained during the call-in, and are simple. Some knowledge specific to the offender or case is usually required to call VINE.

The Arkansas VINE program provides three important services:

First, VINE monitors the custody status of criminal offenders in Arkansas state prison and county jail facilities. VINE will tell participants if an offender is in custody and provide the name and address of the custodial agency. If available, VINE will provide the parole eligibility date and sentence expiration date of state prison inmates.

Second, VINE tracks the case status of offenders with cases pending in the Arkansas court system. VINE provides the next scheduled court event, including the date, type of court, court location and time of court event.

Finally, VINE provides a listing of several state crime victim services. A short description and tele-phone number is available for each.

To register, individuals provide a telephone number where VINE should call with a notification and a four-digit personal identification number code.

Individuals may register more than one telephone number. The same PIN can be used for each registration, but knowledge of the PIN must be provided to the owner of each registered phone number.

Once registered, participants receive notification of changes in custody status, upcoming court events, including cancellations and newly scheduled events. VINE calls automatically if an inmate is released, transferred, escapes or dies. It is also possible to register for e-mail notification, using the secure Web site www.vinelink.com

According to Hart, VINE is a very good and effective service for those whose lives have been touched by crime. She reported very positive results from being registered with the organization.

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