

Police turn to new computer software to help curb crime

Program provides police officers with maps, seconds-old data

BY SHARAHN D. BOYKIN • STAFF WRITER • DECEMBER 6, 2009

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1 | 2 Next Page ▶

SALISBURY – Lower Shore law enforcement agencies may be closer to getting their fingers on the pulse of crime with a new software program that promises to deliver data within seconds to officers and analysts.

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The program uses a mix of Internet mapping, database connections and animation to deliver crime data that can be used to view crime trends on the Shore in the form of traditional tables and charts or an interactive map.

"We designed it so the region can take advantage of the mapping software," said Lt. John Moore of the Salisbury Police Department. "We can cross jurisdictional lines and state lines."

Plans for developing the program started more than a year ago when the city police department applied for a grant. The department was awarded \$197,000 in federal funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act in September. The majority of funds, \$185,000, went to the Eastern Shore Regional GIS Cooperative. The balance of the funds was used to purchase a server and GIS software to run the program, department officials said.

ESRGC, an outreach organization and extension of Salisbury University's geography and geosciences department, provides geographic information system training and access to municipalities on the Shore, according to the university's Web site.

The police department is still working with ESRGC developers to customize and make adjustments to the unnamed program but hope to have officers and analysts using the software by June, Moore said.

The program doesn't reinvent the proverbial wheel. It collects existing data from police agencies so the user can manipulate information to create tables, graphs and maps.

One application, the dashboard, takes offense and arrests information and displays the information visually in the form of a vehicle instrument panel. The dials, which look like a speedometer, display crime information comparisons for a window of time determined by the user.

The interactive crime map could prove to be one of the most useful applications for patrol officers and analysts. Officers can access locations, through police calls for service or other crime reports, where crimes have been reported and display the information in the form of a map that uses icons to pinpoint addresses. The maps can give police personnel a visual on locations that may be experiencing specific types of crime.

1 | 2 Next Page ▶

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