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Sheriff's Office uses Nixle to reach public in emergencies


By Chris Orlet
News Leader

Madison County Sheriff Robert Hertz wants to keep county residents better informed, by utilizing the latest technology.

On March 19, the sheriff's department implemented a communications service that allows it to send important, valuable information directly to residents using a free service called Nixle. Nixle allows the Sheriff's Office to create and publish messages to be delivered to residents who subscribe, instantly via cell phone text message and email. Notification can also be accessed online at www.nixle.com.

Subscribers can select addresses about which they would like to receive electronic notifications. It could be a home, workplace, school or other location, with a coverage radius of one-quarter mile to 25 miles. Messages may include fugitive information, current criminal activity in specific neighborhoods, press release, weather alerts, road closures, and local events. It can also be used to generate new leads for investigations.

Messages can be sent specifically to residents registered within a quarter mile radius, giving them the opportunity to receive accurate information relevant only to their neighborhood. Residents decide from which local agency they want to receive information.

 Nixle partners with the National Law Enforcement Telecommunications System, a secure information sharing system for state and local law enforcement agencies.

Police in various jurisdictions — including Los Angeles, Calif. — already use Nixle. Local jurisdictions include St. Louis, Hazelwood, Florissant, Richmond Heights, Maryland Heights, Town and Country, St. Charles County, St. Peters, Granite City, Glen Carbon, Maryville and St. Clair County.

County residents and those in neighboring counties can register at www.nixle.com. Registration is free, but subscribers may be charged standard text messaging rates by their cell phone providers.

Last year, Highland implemented a similar system called the CodeRED Emergency Notification System. CodeRED enables the city to quickly deliver important messages to all Highland electric customers via phone, email or text messaging at no charge.

Police Chief Terry Bell said he has received a lot of positive feedback about CodeRed. Since its implementation, the system has alerted Highland residents about water main breaks and boil orders and tornado siren testing. "These minor issues have been excellent for working out the bugs before something big happens," he said.

Residents and businesses can visit its website at www.highlandil.gov, click on the CodeRED logo located at the bottom of the home page and enter their contact information, including additional land line or cell phone numbers and text and email addresses. Residents can also stop by city hall at 1115 Broadway for an application form or call at 654-9891.

Messages from the system read Emergency Communications Network or 866-419-5000.

There are more than 100 communities in Illinois that use the CodeRED notification system. Local towns that use it include Wood River, Fairview Heights, Glen Carbon and Dupont.

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