

LOCAL NEWS

Madison County sheriff's office latest to join Nixle network System allows agencies to broadcast community safety notices

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Published: Wednesday, April 7, 2010 10:57 AM CDT

Local residents who want to stay plugged into police and other safety-related alerts and announcements have another option at their disposal.

Barely two weeks ago the Madison County Sheriff's Office became the latest public entity in the area to adopt the use of the Nixle public safety messaging and alert system.

Maryville began using the system in September, 2009. Glen Carbon began using it the following month. Other communities in the region, such as Shiloh, St. Louis, Ballwin and Hazlewood, Mo., also use the system.

Anderson Hospital in Maryville has a connection to the service and a link on its Web site for persons wishing to receive community safety alerts.

"It's just another way to keep the public informed," Madison County Sheriff Bob Hertz said.

The multi-functional system provides a tool for agencies to post crime and weather alerts and other types of community notifications. Specific geographical areas can be selected for dissemination.

Persons who sign up with the service can receive real-time alerts and other messages by way of e-mail, text message and through such services as Twitter if enabled. Other announcements can be viewed by anyone with an Internet connection.

Glen Carbon Chief of Police David Bradford said the service is working fine although he did have some concerns about some of the content users are posting on it as relates to privacy issues.

"We're kind of looking at our use of it and are looking at expanding it again," Bradford said. Departments and municipalities managing a Nixle connection can choose to use its full range of communication functions or limit them to match their specific needs.

"The more people that sign up the better it is," Bradford said.

Hertz cited the incident involving a suspicious vehicle and man that approached a young girl in the Mitchell area of Granite City on March 18 as an example of something which the Nixle service can help with, by getting word out to as many people as possible.

"We wanted this to go out county wide," Hertz said.

According to the service, Nixle began allowing users to sign up nationwide in 2009. If a person's community does not use the service, those persons will be notified by e-mail when and if their location becomes available.

Nixle was founded in 2007 by CEO Craig Mitnick, whose background includes work as an analyst for Fox News and CBS Radio.

He holds a law degree from George Washington University School of Law. The Nixle service works in partnership with the International Justice and Public Safety Network (NIJPS). Representatives of the company have not publicized where funding for the service has come from other than to say it is from private and not public sources.

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