

Newberry County Sheriff Lee Foster has announced a ground breaking technology to better serve the victims of crime in Newberry County.

Sheriff Foster said that the Newberry County Sheriff's Office is the first in South Carolina and quite possibly the first in the nation to use electronic victim forms.

The system is simple, while a deputy is on the scene of a crime which requires the use of a victim form, the deputy uses their cell phone to enter a secure portal and complete the victim form. The victim then signs the form on the deputy's phone.

Once the form is completed, a copy of the victim form is sent by text and/or email to the victim while the deputy is still there. The victim also receives information on their rights as a victim, important contact telephone numbers for additional resources, and how to register to receive notifications from SAVIN, which is the South Carolina Statewide Automated Victim Information and Notification System) on their phone and in their email.

The system also automatically emails a copy of the victim form to the Deputy and to the Victim Advocate.

Law enforcement can then use the system to text and/or email the victim to notify them of continuing activity on the case such as the need to contact an investigator, arrest(s) in the case, bond hearings, and court.

Sheriff Foster said that this also helps immensely in preserving the victim's rights. Foster said that if there is some time between when the victim's form is done and the arrest, it is sometimes difficult for law enforcement to insure that a copy of the form gets to the detention center and the courts. Instead of attempting to maintain this form in paper format for months or longer, this system has a secure

portal through which users in the criminal justice system for the jail and courts can see and print the electronic form using the case number or other information.

“We are without question living in the digital age,” said Sheriff Foster. “We have and continue to look for ways to better serve the public and be more efficient in our duties. This is just another example of how Newberry County stays on the forefront of technology in law enforcement.”

Sheriff Foster said that in addition to quickly getting the form and information for additional resources to the victim, other positives about the electronic forms are that many of the deputies can complete the electronic form quicker than handwriting it, the information on the form is legible, the form is rapidly sent to those who need to get it instead of attempting to distribute carbon copies, and there is no printing costs associated with the electronic forms unless the jail has to print one for the bond court.

Sheriff Foster said that in one case, the suspect was harassing the victim using multiple phone numbers so the victim would not answer the phone. The case investigator used the portal to send the victim a message to call him. The victim was very appreciative for the system because she was able to talk to the investigator on the case without having to answer a telephone call from a number she did not know.

The system is allowing for faster notification of victims for court appearances as well. Before if the detention center could not get in touch with a victim, they had to send a deputy to try to find them. This system allows the jail to quickly notify the victim to call the detention center for important information and then to notify in a convenient method about any release of the inmate or court hearings. This makes court function better and keeps deputies attending to patrol and other law enforcement functions.

The system is so intuitive that it defaults to send the information in English, but if the victim does not speak/read English fluently, the deputy can change the form and have the victim's information sent to them in Spanish while the deputy, victim advocate, and portal copies remain in English. This insures that the victim understands their rights even if there are language barriers.

The Newberry County Sheriff's Office partnered with Salient CRGT on this project. Sheriff Foster said that when they explained the many issues associated with paper victim forms, Salient CRGT took an immediate interest in the project. They worked closely with deputies and victim advocates at the Newberry County Sheriff's Office to create an easy to use technological solution to a real issue facing law enforcement. Salient CRGT is now making this resource available to other law enforcement agencies after using Newberry County for the proving grounds for the project.

"We are pleased about partnership with Salient CRGT," said Foster. "They came to us and asked how they could assist us in better serving the public through technology. They listened to our plight with the paper process for victim forms and then allowed us to help them develop this product, which will likely become the standard for most law enforcement agencies."

Since the product is in its infancy, additional enhancements are anticipated including automated notifications to the victim.

\*\*\*Pictured are left to right, Investigator Ren Henderson, Investigator Ryan Dickert, Victim Advocate Connie Johnson, and COPS Deputy Sherri Scott\*\*\*