

New Albany police get grant for computer system

It's to fight crimes against children

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The New Albany Police Department has received a \$20,000 grant to fight Internet-related crimes against children.

The grant, awarded last month by the Caesars Foundation of Floyd County, will allow the department to buy computer equipment.

That equipment will be used "to detect, prosecute and eliminate child sexual predators that exploit children via the Internet," Detective Sherri Knight wrote in the grant application.

Knight runs the Crimes Against Children unit, which was formed within the department's detective division last year. Late last year she attended a weeklong training course called Internet Crimes Against Children Investigative Techniques, held by the U.S. Attorney General's office.

Knight said yesterday that the computers, to be purchased next month, will allow her "to be online where they (sexual predators) conduct their activities."

One of the computers to be purchased will be used to copy hard drives of the computers seized from suspects so the duplicates can be examined for evidence without disturbing the originals.

Also on the shopping list are laptop computers, a printer, a projection system, a supply of blank hard drives and special software.

Detective Greg Pennell has been tapped as the computer forensics examiner who would extract information from the hard drives.

Pennell said the software he will use, called EnCase Forensics, is often able to recover files that have been deleted.

He cited the case of John Wilburn, who pleaded guilty to child sex charges in 2003. New Albany detectives got help in that case from FBI computer analysts in Indianapolis.

"We were able to obtain photographic evidence which had been deleted from the storage card of a digital camera," Pennell said.

Wilburn was sentenced to 20 years in prison, with eight years suspended.

Knight said she has another case under investigation in which a man made contact with a 13-year-old New Albany girl online. He later "found out where she lived, came to her house when her parents weren't home and he raped her," Knight said.

Before the new effort can begin, Pennell has to get two weeks of training with the EnCase software, at a cost of \$5,000. The Caesars grant will only pay for the equipment.

Police Chief Merle Harl said yesterday that he doesn't know where the money for the software training will come from.

"But we're going to come up with it," he said. "It's too important a project to just let it go."

The equipment also will be used to help educate other officers and the public about computer-related crimes against children. And Harl said it would be helpful in any other crimes involving computers.