

Technology and the Taylor Police Department

Technology, technology, technology! It's great when it works, terrible when it doesn't, and extremely frustrating to many who wish they could afford it but can't. Smaller cities everywhere have a tendency to look at their larger and richer "neighbors" in awe. Often because of the lack of dollars, the smaller cities resign themselves to the perception that they are too small to be leaders in technology.

Taylor is a city of about 15,000 situated 20 miles southeast of Austin. The City of Taylor Police Department has demonstrated that small can be mighty when it comes to technology!

Technology development at the Taylor Police Department (TPD) began in 1999 with the arrival of Police Chief Jeff Straub and a shared vision of city staff and the Taylor City Council. "I had been involved in the evaluation and purchase of software packages, AFIS (automated fingerprint identification systems), and mobile data solutions with the Temple Police Department and in McGregor. It was obvious that we in a smaller city could not afford multi-million dollar software and hardware. We needed to find feature-rich systems that were affordable for us and obtain grant funding to get the systems in place. The city staff and our city council were excited and extremely supportive."

First, the TPD obtained Crimesoft (<http://www.crimesoft.com>), an extremely powerful, easily networked, and affordable relational database, designed specifically for smaller police departments. The software has a call-for-service module that permits detailed call and personnel time analysis, reporting software that permits searches of any field or multiple fields with instant

results, digital mugshots, digital crime scene photos, and much more. Crimesoft was an instant and powerful relief from an old, cumbersome Cobol-based records management system. With the integration of off-the-shelf mapping software, detailed crime analysis or accident analysis maps can be easily created. All this and more features were obtained for not millions or even hundreds of thousands of dollars, but less than \$5,000.

Next, with Local Law Enforcement Block Grant funds, the TPD obtained AFIX Tracker, an in-house, automated fingerprint system.

The next goal was to deploy mobile data and an infrastructure that could be shared with other agencies around the state.

The TPD received U.S. Department of Justice "Cops More" funding in 2002 for \$111,713 to purchase mobile data computers, software, and, most importantly, a mobile data server. Using GPRS (wireless data cellular technology), officers anywhere within range of the GPRS (which is around almost any major city in the U.S.) are able to query state and national databases and communicate securely with one another and with dispatch.

"The great advantage of having our own mobile data server," said Straub, "is that we are also able to share this technology with other agencies without them having to incur the high costs of purchasing a server and dedicated data lines. Other agencies only need to acquire laptops, the client software, and GPRS access, and we can provide the rest. This is extremely powerful for agencies in our area because it gives us an additional way to communicate and

share information in a secure manner."

The Leander Police Department has been the first to take Taylor up and use the Taylor server.

What's next at the TPD? Currently, they're working with Taylor's community network (CNET) and a wireless broadband provider to implement a VPN (virtual private network) and "hot spots" around the community that will allow officers to use all the power of the department's reporting and records management software to be tapped from patrol units in the field.★

For more information, contact Taylor Police Chief Jeff Straub at jeff.straub@ci.taylor.tx.us or (512) 352-5552.

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