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Detroit Police starting crime e-mail system

*BY AMBER HUNT
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UPDATED AT 12:01 P.M. -- Coming soon to Facebook and MySpace pages near you: the Detroit Police Department.

The department this morning announced plans to become one of the first police organizations in a major U.S. city to launch pages on the popular social networking sites in hopes of drawing tips.

"One little smidge of information is all we need to get on the right track," Deputy Chief James Tolbert said. "We will end up arresting a lot of people using this."

The pages are the final of three phases in a plan designed to use social networking, e-mail and text messages to alert people to crime in their neighborhoods and generate tips.

Phase 1 begins today with the launch of Network Alert, which allows people to sign up to get information on crime trends and be-on-the-lookout-type descriptions of missing or wanted people via text or email.

• **VISIT DETROIT POLICE ONLINE:** <http://www.detroitmi.gov/police> target="_blank">Visit the Detroit Police Department's Web site

Tolbert said he expects the department will begin sending alerts by the end of the week.

Phase 2 will be the launch of a 411 tip line on which people will be able to send anonymous tips about crimes. The cell phone numbers from which the tips come will be encrypted so that even law-enforcement agents won't be able to retrieve them, Tolbert said.

Sgt. Eren Stephens Bell said that might encourage people to send tips even from crime scenes.

"They can type, 'He's standing right next to you in the orange shirt,'" she said.

Police said they hope that ability counters the city's "don't snitch" culture and makes people more comfortable in relating information without fear of retribution from the criminals.

The two-year cost of the alert program is about \$70,000, Tolbert said. The money is coming from drug forfeiture funds from Detroit, the FBI, the U.S. Marshals and other agencies that work with the city on task forces.

"This is going to remove some of the concerns we have about communication problems," said Mary McKissie, who heads the Detroit Citizens Police Academy Alumni Association.

Alumna Dory Bryant, 54, said she's most excited about the Facebook and MySpace page launches

because they will reach young people.

"You'd be surprised how many kids know exactly what's going on in the neighborhood, and they tell everything," she said.

Tolbert said phases 2 and 3 are expected to be online within 30 days.

People who sign up for the alerts can specify which district or precinct they'd like to hear from. The project is coordinated by CitizenObserver, which already works with agencies in Lansing, St. Clair and Portage.

• **VISIT CITIZENOBSERVER ONLINE:**<http://www.citizenobserver.com>" target="_blank"> Go to CitizenObserver's Web site

The company immediately erases all IP addresses and other information that could allow for tips to be traced, Tolbert said, so they can't be tracked even by subpoena.

Enriquetta Sanchez, 77, said she hopes the new initiative revolutionizes tip-gathering in Detroit.

"People need to know that somebody's always watching," she said.

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