



enforcement agencies and officers in the field who participate in the network to access criminal information instantly and simultaneously from their desks, vehicles or handheld devices.

Both sheriffs were determined to help create a data-sharing program to help law enforcement agencies better communicate and identify criminals in their parishes. The sheriffs say they could never imagine being without the technology of Thinkstream, and want others in their field to also realize its effectiveness as “an essential tool to effectively and efficiently fight crime.”

“Thinkstream and this type of technology is going to become the norm. It’s almost going to be impossible for an agency to provide police services if they don’t have access to timely and accurate information,” Lafourche Parish Sheriff Craig Webre said.

Their departments in rural south Louisiana were like others across the country – they were generally aware of only the crimes that occurred in their jurisdiction. Information about crimes that were taking place in other areas was often gleaned through media coverage or through after-the-fact criminal exchange meetings between different agencies. Also, since the greatest majority of arrests occur during vehicle stops, Edwards and Webre said they knew they needed an effective system that provided timely information in place.

Thinkstream’s software connects disparate police electronic-records systems, allowing agencies to share such data as police reports and suspect photographs instantly. From a patrol car laptop or police station, an arresting deputy in one town can instantly determine that a suspect had prior run-ins with police in another city or town. In the past, Edwards and Webre’s agencies shared information by phone, fax or mail, which could take days.

“One of my goals and objectives as Sheriff was to put as much information as quickly as we could in the hands of the deputies on the street so they could

be better informed before approaching a potential criminal. We’re excited to have a system like Thinkstream in place because it allows us to do that,” Jefferson Davis Parish Sheriff Ricky Edwards said.

Their involvement in law enforcement on a state and national level – Webre is second vice president of the National Sheriffs’ Association while Edwards recently finished a term as Louisiana Sheriff’s Association president afforded them the opportunity to be tuned into this evolving trend of interoperability among agencies in law enforcement.

“I was able to come into contact with individuals who were not only aware of innovative technology but were successful using it,” Webre said

The sheriffs began hearing about the technology of Thinkstream during law enforcement conventions and meetings in Louisiana. East Baton Rouge Parish Sheriff Col. Mike Barnett, who has since retired, told his colleagues that his department in Baton Rouge was the first in the state after 9/11 to use Thinkstream’s integrated criminal justice system. Barnett said that in less than 14 days the system in East Baton Rouge Parish was up and running and successful on all accounts. Col. Barnett said the technology provided significant benefits; among others the ability for police officers in the field to obtain access to a suspect’s entire criminal history almost right away.

“I knew other software companies had failed and here was a credible source of information for law enforcement who had a broad-base knowledge of how to run a modern agency and he’s telling me the system developed by Thinkstream was actually working,” Webre recalled.

After a presentation by Thinkstream’s engineering team in December of 2003, its President Barry Bellue, Sr. offered Sheriff Webre an opportunity for Lafourche Parish to serve as the hub for the southeast region of Louisiana. Sheriff Edwards’ depart-



ment in Jefferson Davis Parish came on board a year later after agreeing to serve as the statewide hub for the system.

However, Sheriff Webre admitted he still had his doubts about its deployment and success in the field.

“They told me they could have the system up and running in two to three weeks. I was impressed, but skeptical to say the least,” he said. “But, to my pleasure, they delivered - the system was installed and integrated and we were up and running as they promised.”

It was a lucrative deal not only for the area’s law enforcement community, but also for the citizens of Lafourche Parish, Webre said. “I immediately began to recognize the value of having information integrated and doing it in a way that protects the integrity of that information because it resides in my network,” Webre said.

Other systems require users to submit information to a larger network, where it’s then re-entered, making the information vulnerable to inaccuracies and security breaches. Thinkstream simply takes an agency’s existing network and extracts that information, organizing it to make sense to other agencies participating in the network.

“That way we just keep inputting our own information while maintaining control of our information,” Webre said.

Bellue’s company continued to deploy the technology offering to donate the software to every agency in Louisiana in an effort to put the state ahead of the game in this kind of technology. Since then, the company has set up 13 regional hubs and connected over 150 local agencies to the statewide justice network making it the largest civil

and criminal information network in the nation. Bellue said he believes the technology could become the national standard for data-sharing systems and could eventually link other states and even federal agencies together.

"A deputy can execute a single query that hits all the databases, rather than re-executing queries," he said. Consequently, criminal histories that previously took days or weeks to access are now available within seconds. Bellue said the network and technology his company developed is a win-win situation that benefits all law enforcement and the citizens of the state. As a native Louisianian with family ties in the law enforcement field – his brother and son-in-law are both police officers - the decision to donate the software comes easy for him.

"Our sheriff deputies and police officers are among the greatest public servants we have in our state. They give of themselves sacrificially and daily put their lives at risk for their community. It is an honor for my company and me to be associated with the likes of these heroes and to lend a hand in providing law enforcement tools that may very well help save their lives and the lives of our citizens," Bellue said.

While their partnership with Thinkstream has been a boost to the officers in the area of preventing and solving crimes, both sheriffs say the technology also aids in arrests of less serious crimes other than felonies because it allows access to misdemeanors outside their jurisdiction. Access to this information has helped deputies track down fugitives with arrest warrants or missing suspects who have slipped through the system because they weren't on the federal databases, Edwards said.

"We're solving all cases that need to be taken care of like actively pursuing warrants and closing them down," Edwards said. We're able to effectively do law enforcement for smaller communities," he said.

Thinkstream also has taken some of the burden from the dispatchers who are responsible for handling calls, saving

their agencies time and money. Before the new system, officers would have to radio a dispatcher to check license tags and Ids, and then wait for the dispatcher to check several databases before getting their information. Now, officers can enter a license plate number and get a name, criminal history, and a picture of the suspect, in a matter of seconds.

"It's very important for our guys in the field to have as much information as fast as possible on an individual before he comes into contact with that person," Edwards said.

Webre hailed the technology as the most significant breakthrough since the development of automated fingerprints and DNA. Both sheriffs are convinced that it will save the lives of police officers as well as provide invaluable protection to the citizens of a community.

"Thinkstream has opened up an entire world of information to identify and retrieve information about suspects. "There is no doubt that when we incorporated this technology we became a safer parish," Webre said.

The sheriffs said the value of Thinkstream continues to increase as more and more agencies participate and both say they will keep promoting the network and technology to other agencies and deputies who may not be aware of its capabilities or that it's even available.

"There is no question at all that this technology will improve a department's ability to get and share accurate vital information," Webre said.

There is camaraderie and brotherhood that exist between deputies no matter where they work. Perhaps it is this profound bond among law enforcement that's motivating these two Louisiana sheriffs to promote technology they know will protect the lives of their own so they can protect the citizens of their communities.

"Thinkstream's technology allows small-town rural America – even one-man departments - to have the same investigative powers as the New York City Police Department as long as they have a secure Internet connection," Edwards said. "I'm a dreamer and I'm

going to keep pumping this up because I know it's the right thing to do," he said.

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