

IN THE NEWS

Scanner Puts Suspects' ID at the fingertips of police

Phil Long Herald Staff Writer

reprinted from the Miami Herald 3/11/97

SANFORD - Like a loaf of bread at the grocery store, every suspect arrested in Seminole County is born with a bar code. It's called a fingerprint.

Now, with the same technology that revolutionized the supermarket checkout line, police have "Live Scan," a while-you-wait scanner that quickly compares a suspect's fingerprints to more than 1.5 million others in a state database.

Such a device has huge implications in a state like Florida, where visiting and resident miscreants often lie about their identity when arrested on even minor infractions. As a result, dangerous fugitives slip through the cracks.

"This is the single greatest advancement in law enforcement in the last half century," said Seminole County Sheriff Don Eslinger. "As the database grows in Florida and across the country, the value of this process will become incredible."

It is being tested in five county jails by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement in conjunction with county sheriffs from Seminole, Pasco, Marion, Volusia and Escambia.

Suspects put their fingers on the device's glass front. A laser scans their fingerprints and converts them into 10 computer pictures. Moments later it transmits images to FDLE's headquarters in Tallahassee where a computer analyzes prints at 11,000 per second looking for matches between known criminals and the suspect. Meanwhile the suspect sits waiting in jail.

Fugitives go undetected because most often they have fake IDs, or have no identification at all. With no way to verify identification, jailers often release them never knowing they are wanted on serious charges.

"You can't depend on the criminal telling the truth. Live Scan will," said Tim Moore, FDLE commissioner.

The old comparison can take weeks. The new system takes minutes.

"The machine uses a laser to read a fingerprint the way a supermarket scanner reads a bar code," said Tom Watkins, state coordinator for the FDLE's Automated Fingerprint Identification System. "Only in this case the laser is looking at the patterns, the ridges and valleys, the unique mosaic that is a fingerprint."

Several other states are experimenting with "Live Scan" technology, but Florida is the largest to use it statewide.

Dade County already has eight "Live Scan" units, Watkins said, but they are not yet connected to the FDLE database. Statewide, it will cost \$3 million.

Every day the FDLE gets 2,300 fingerprints from hundreds of local police agencies. Just over 17 percent of those cards come from Dade County. By the end of the decade, Watkins said, there will be 2.5 million fingerprint files in Tallahassee.

The electronic system can handle 3,000 searches a day at a peak of about 400 an hour. So far, the counties in the pilot program are getting a two-minute response time. The system is designed for a 10-minute response time, even during peak usage. Watkins says the time will become faster as computers advance.

Charles Henderson, a Seminole County corrections officer, has become an expert on the machine.

You can't make a mistake, Henderson said during a demonstration, because the computer won't allow it.

As a light bar just above the glass slides slowly from left to right, Henderson rolls the finger across the glass at the same speed.

As he does, a much enlarged image of the fingerprint grows across the screen. Soon there are 12 images - one for each digit and two sets with four fingers each.

"Within five years we will have the capability to do this kind of fingerprint verification straight from the patrol car," Eslinger said.

THOMAS FADUL RECEIVES EXCELLENCE AWARD

Reprinted from PBA Heat February 1997

The Metro-Dade Police Department announced that Criminalist Thomas Fadul of the Firearms and Toolmark Unit, Crime Laboratory Bureau, was selected to receive an Employee Excellence award.

Criminalist Fadul has been assigned to the Bureau's Firearm and Toolmark Unit for two years and five months. During this time he has distinguished himself through his outstanding efforts and actions. His conduct has contributed greatly to mission accomplishments and his enthusiasm has resulted in healthy morale benefits for the entire Unit.

Prior to becoming a Laboratory Examiner, Criminalist Fadul worked for the FBI and later for the Metro-Dade Fingerprint ID Section. After reassignment to the Crime Laboratory Bureau, he underwent a two-year training program and is now a qualified firearm and toolmark examiner. The Crime Laboratory's Firearm and Toolmark Unit has the responsibility for examining all firearms and toolmark evidence generated in Dade County.

In October 1995, the Metro-Dade Crime Laboratory implemented a multi-media computer program entitled DRUGFIRE. The program allows a laboratory firearm and toolmark examiner to store microscopic computer images of fired cartridge casings and bullets. The images are used as an open case files to be compared against subsequent shooting evidence. The program is administered at a State of Florida consortium thereby necessitating constant communication between Florida Crime Laboratories.

Criminalist Fadul distinguished himself early in the use and development of the system. During his training as a Firearm and Toolmark Examiner, he was assigned much of the

DRUGFIRE work. He acted as Metro-Dade's primary liaison between examiners, the State of Florida DRUGFIRE User's and the FBI System Development Group. Much of that work was self-initiated and accounted for many hours of communication and hard work. He was assigned the task of test-firing all routine gun confiscations and comparing the tests.

Those actions paid off almost immediately with a routine gun violation being linked to a homicide within the first month of operation. His effort, genuine interest and enthusiasm for this important program led to the Unit's early and continued success. As of this writing, Metro-Dade and only two other Crime Laboratories have been recognized nationally for their high rates of success and innovative implementation of DRUGFIRE.

The six members of the Firearm and Toolmark unit have made more than 117 links between shooting cases using DRUGFIRE. These links were termed cold hits as no other information had previously tied these cases together. Criminalist Fadul is responsible for 57 of these links. Through his efforts alone, more than 2,000 cases were individually screened. Proper examinations require patience, concentration and a good bit of tenacity.

Some typical scenarios of case links are casings found on the scene of a homicide matched to a gun confiscated during the carrying of a concealed firearm arrest, casings found at the scene of a shooting into an occupied dwelling matched to casings at a home invasion robbery/shooting, casings found at the scene of an aggravated battery matched to a firearm confiscated during a robbery arrest.