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## Video technicians create a crime-solving system

**Patricia Biggs**

The Arizona Republic  
Jan. 17, 2004 12:00 AM

Two Chandler police video technicians have become crime-busters, aiding law-enforcement agencies across the Valley.



Russell Gates/The Arizona Republic

A homicide and a string of video-store burglaries were among the 100 cases they've worked in the past several months for Scottsdale, Phoenix, Tempe, Mesa and Maricopa County as well as for Chandler detectives.

Jim Schwalenberg, a video production specialist with the Chandler Police Department, uses a computer to enhance the surveillance video's image of a robbery suspect.

The two men also are part of a federal Homeland Defense Forensic Video Analysis Response Team, which is on call in the Western states.

Until a year ago, Jim Schwalenberg and Eddie Burns had been producing films for police training and the Channel 98 public-safety program.

Sgt. Mark Franzen, a Chandler police spokesman, said Schwalenberg "saw the need and the demand" for video forensics in solving crimes. He pitched the idea, and the department won a \$40,000 grant for a computer system and dTective software program by Ocean Systems.

"It's an emerging science," Schwalenberg said. "There is a big call for it, and it'll only get bigger as things advance."

Burns agrees, saying the amount of video evidence available to detectives continues to grow.

"The average person is on 12 different cameras on any given day," Burns said.

Schwalenberg went to training in Maryland, and Burns trained with the FBI in Quantico, Va.

As the video producers added criminal investigative work to their daily duties, they had to learn such things as handling evidence correctly and testifying in court.

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"They were instructed on any new policies and procedures so they could begin being part of our investigative team," Franzen said.

The training has paid off for detectives across the Valley.

After Phoenix manicurist Ha Nu Hoang was found dead in the trunk of her Honda Accord on Aug. 11 in Scottsdale, homicide detectives traced her back to Casino Arizona the night of Aug. 8. Scottsdale Detective Tom Van Meter soon learned there were 400 cameras in the casino.

"We just literally tracked them all through the casino, him watching her all throughout the evening. Once they walked through the door, then we knew the last time she was last seen alive," Van Meter said.

After watching 50 hours of videotape, he turned to Chandler for help.

"I knew Chandler had that software," Van Meter said. "You can isolate images, and things just look better. You can blow them up without distorting it too bad."

One of the views showed a man following Hoang out of the casino.

A week later, Van Meter had an image clear enough to show on television. Within four hours of releasing it, Scottsdale police began hearing from citizens, he said.

Sameh Basta called from New York to ask why his picture was being circulated. Within days, Scottsdale police arrested him.

Basta was indicted Oct. 6 on charges of first-degree murder and kidnapping.

"I give Chandler credit," Van Meter said. "They seem to be pretty much on top of the new technology."

The Chandler technicians helped their own detectives solve a string of East Valley burglaries after a surveillance tape inside a Blockbuster Video showed two men lifting merchandise.

The 30-second video was grainy, with quickly flashing images compressed in alternating frames. Burns copied it as a digital recording and sent the tape back to the evidence room to preserve it.

Then he went to work on the digital images, picking them apart.

"We use a series of filters to change pixel shapes without changing images," Burns said. "Is that a scar, a mole or an artifact on the tape? We look for consistencies."

Even such things as the emblem on the hood of a car or the pattern headlights make on asphalt have been useful, he said.

Although one of the burglary suspects wore plain dark clothing and a cap, the techs were able to get an identifiable image of both men.

After four days, Burns had 12 images to send to detectives.

"When our work is done here, the detectives' work is just starting," Burns said.

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One of the detectives thought he recognized one of the suspects and interviewed him. Faced with the photos of himself, the burglar confessed and named his accomplice, police said.

Burns said he prefers the excitement of the forensic work to producing training films.

"Eddie gets kind of animated when he does it," Schwalenberg said. "Saying, 'Ooh, yeah, I gotcha now!' "

Burns replied: "Most of the time I stay in my seat."

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