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Federal grant money will fund video enhancement system

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By: Nicole Bywater

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Crooks will no longer be able to hide in fuzzy surveillance videos, thanks to a new video-enhancement system the Lewisville Police Department bought with \$25,000 of federal grant money.

Almost the entire amount of the local law enforcement grant awarded by the U.S. Department of Justice was spent on the video equipment. The \$25,287 grant also requires a 10 percent match from the city, bringing the total available to \$28,097. The rest of the funds will be used to purchase steel frames, which will be used in firearms training by the officers, assistant police chief Jerry Galler said.

"We had to seriously look at getting the [video] equipment because it took nearly all of the grant money," Galler said. "But we think it'll do a lot for us. I've seen demos of the equipment and it's incredible what they can actually bring out of the video."

The funds were accepted at the Oct. 6 city council meeting, and a committee approved the purchase decisions last week. Galler said he hopes to see the new equipment within a month or two.

According to Galler, surveillance videotape from recorders such as those in convenience stores, ATM machines and police in-car cameras, is often of poor quality or is time-lapse video. The new software, called dTective, was developed by Maryland-based Ocean Systems and is powered by Avid Xpress software.

It can brighten, stabilize or isolate parts of a video to allow police to identify faces, license plates or other details from dark or shaky parts. It also can convert time-lapse video into real-time and "demultiplex" or isolate footage taken from a system of cameras into a particular camera's footage needed to see the evidence.

"We hope to be able to identify suspects or even clear someone from being a suspect, that we wouldn't otherwise be able to," Galler said.

He cited one example of the need for the equipment when surveillance footage captured a shooting that took place in a crowded area. Two suspects were dressed in the same manner and had similar features, and witnesses claimed both of them were the shooter. However the software allowed police to identify one man as the shooter and clear the other one.

"Historically, we know that one criminal doesn't just commit one crime," Galler said. "When we identify someone, we stop a series of crimes, at least temporarily."

Galler said he has used the same video system at the Grapevine Police Department to solve crimes. That department has had the system since December, said Grapevine Sgt. Todd Dearing.

"It's made a world of difference," he said. "The big thing is being able to see what's on a videotape, no matter what the format, because it digitizes the analog signal and allows us to watch everything on a frame-by-frame basis."

The Arlington Police Department was the first in the area with the system, which it bought about six months before Grapevine did, Dearing said. Tarrant County and the Dallas Police Department also are using the same system, while Hurst has a different brand, but similar system, Dearing said.

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"Around here it's very new," he said. "A lot of departments are starting to get them, especially with more grants being made available through the Department of Homeland Security."

The system is sure to benefit other citizens in the area.

"We'll certainly allow other departments the use of our equipment," Galler said. "Criminals don't know boundaries; they don't stop at the city limits."

According to the company's Web site, several hundred dTective systems are being used successfully by federal, state and local law-enforcement agencies, including the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Central Intelligence Agency and Drug Enforcement Agency, as well as other government and private security groups in the U.S. and around the world. The forensic technology was even used to solve a crime on the season finale of the HBO crime drama "The Wire" last August.

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