**The Southern Oregon High-Tech Crimes Task Force**

**The Problem:** Throughout the history of law enforcement, nothing has influenced criminal activity and investigative techniques more than technology and its rapid advancement. Just as technology has provided law enforcement with greater resources, so has it provided the criminal element with new and innovative ways to victimize society.

The Southern Oregon High-Tech Crimes Task Force began as one small city’s response to the growing problem of child exploitation and the sharing of child pornography through the internet. It has evolved into a multi-agency program that not only investigates child pornography but also aids in the analysis of digital evidence, assists with search warrants relating to cyber crime, helps prosecutors in building cases involving digital evidence, and provides training to parents and children in staying safe while using the internet.

The City of Central Point (pop. 17,000) is located in southwest Oregon, 33 miles north of the California-Oregon border and approximately 300 miles south of the Portland metropolitan area. Beginning in 2005, the Central Point Police Department ([www.cp-pd.com](http://www.cp-pd.com)) created the first ever High-Tech Crimes Unit in Southern Oregon. (**HTCU**) The Central Point Police Department is a small department with only 24 sworn police officers. What started as one Detective working on Central Point Police cases quickly evolved into a regional multi-jurisdictional Task Force boasting one of the most advanced and well equipped digital evidence forensic laboratories in the State of Oregon.

In January 2007, the Southern Oregon High-Tech Crimes Task Force (**SOHTCTF**) was established when the City of Medford (pop. 76,000) joined forces with the City of Central Point. In August of that same year a new state-of-the-art facility was constructed to house the Task Force inside the former Central Point City Hall. The Task Force provides digital forensic services to the lower half of the State of Oregon, serving over 40 local law enforcement agencies and approximately 550,000 citizens.

Within the facility there is a digital evidence forensics lab, two administrative offices, a secure evidence vault, and a classroom equipped with over 18 computers to teach both the public and other law enforcement agencies about technology and Internet safety. The lab is equipped with several new forensic workstations, some of those include; an Apple forensic workstation, a dedicated workstation for mobile devices such as cellular phones and PDA’s, forensic laptop computers, as well as an array of additional high-tech hardware. The forensic examiners have a vast library of cutting edge forensic software available to them at all times within the lab and they have the ability to use all of these tools in the field when the situation dictates.

In 2009 the two Task Force investigators carried a case load of 120 and examined almost 300 items placed in evidence. In addition to securing convictions for crimes including child sexual abuse, child pornography, and computer crime, members of the Task Force routinely present evidence of forensic findings for other agencies for a myriad of crimes including; homicide, major assault, sexual abuse, child abuse, narcotics, arson, extortion, identity theft, and more. In many instances the evidence located by the Task Force during a forensic examination is so incriminating it prompts a guilty plea by the suspect and a court trial is not necessary. The Task Force is especially proud of its 100% conviction rate.

The Task Force is currently staffed with a Lieutenant from the Central Point Police Department, a Detective with the Medford Police Department, and a Crime Analyst / Support Specialist from the Central Point Police Department as well. The Task Force currently provides forensic services and investigative assistance to over 30 federal, state and local law enforcement agencies throughout the State of Oregon.

Late in 2009 the City of Central Point signed an agreement with the FBI to join the Southern Oregon High-Tech Crimes Task Force. In the near future the Task Force hopes to expand to include more local agencies who have pledged their support in dedicating sworn personnel to this multi-agency program.

The Task Force is primarily funded by the City of Central Point with supplemental funding from the City of Medford and contracts held with other police agencies across the State of Oregon.

The lab is equipped with its own dedicated network which includes a server, a Storage Area Network (SAN), and a tape backup solution – thus, ensuring the containment and security of the lab’s vital information and evidence. All evidence that is forensically imaged is done so directly to the SAN, therefore allowing the investigators to look at evidence from any workstation and it also eliminates the need to house multiple individual hard drives. With the intricate network system the lab also utilizes rainbow tables and distributed network attack (DNA) to expedite the cracking of passwords. Another security component to the lab is the free independent Internet line provided by a local service provider that is used exclusively for undercover Internet investigations. This allows investigators to conduct online investigations without the fear of being identified as a law enforcement agency by suspects or system administrators.

The Task Force is divided into three equally important components; reactive investigations (forensic examinations of evidence), proactive investigations (online undercover operations), and public education. The Task Force receives or initiates four new cases every week, and normally conducts three to four public education courses monthly on topics ranging from online safety for parents and children, online identity theft prevention, and online sexual predator awareness. The Task Force also conducts regular training for law enforcement and other governmental agencies on computer crimes, online investigations and proper search and seizure techniques.

In addition to having certified, highly skilled forensic computer examiners (one of which has been qualified as an expert witness), the Task Force has created a vigorous and local law enforcement presence on the Internet by conducting proactive investigations to identify, arrest, and hold accountable those who choose to use the Internet to commit crimes. The Task Force has been responsible for multiple arrests of individuals involved with all types of high-tech crimes; however its primary emphasis has been on those who are exploiting children.

The cost of the Task force is approximately $75,000 per year, not counting the personnel costs of the investigators and the evidence technician. The recent addition of the FBI to the Task Force has resulted in an additional forensics investigator and a grant of $50,000 which was used in the recent remodel of the forensics laboratory.

**Lessons Learned:** The number of criminal cases needing computer examination or digital forensics continue to grow. The Task Force will be adding additional investigators from new partner agencies in an effort to become more proactive. Hopefully, a proactive attack on internet crime and child exploitation will begin to stem the flow of these types of criminal activities.

The Mayor and City Council and the citizens of our two communities, Central Point and Medford are extremely proud of the work accomplished by the Southern Oregon High-Tech Crimes Task Force.