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## Residents become officers' eyes, ears

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CEDAR CITY - The Iron County Sheriff's Office, in collaboration with the Iron County Office of Emergency Services, is following the lead of the Cedar City Police Department and adding its own Volunteers in Police Service Program, to begin this spring.

The program is part of the International Association of Chiefs of Police and chooses volunteer residents to become the eyes and ears of local law enforcement to help in non-threatening situations.

"It's just an added resource we have now for events that require extra bodies," Sheriff Mark Gower said about the program.

Gower said the volunteers were not taking the place of actual county deputies and would not have any law enforcement authority, but would assist in observing and reporting any unusual behavior around the county.

"They will just maintain continuity with the general population," VIPS coordinator for the Sheriff's Office, Bill Nicks, an Iron County Office of Emergency Services volunteer said. He added that volunteers are no different than active, concerned citizens looking out for their neighborhoods.

Cedar City Police Department VIPS coordinator Mark Browne, the first volunteer for the now six-person service out of that office, said their job is to take some of the less important things off the police officers' plates so they can do what they need to do.

Some of these tasks include traffic control during accidents, community relations, graffiti tracking, vacation home watches, nuisance control, parking lot patrols, fingerprinting and issuing violations for parking in handicapped spots on private property.

Gower said his volunteers would not have access to write citations, but would be used more as observers in the county.

Cedar City Police Department Sgt. Darin Adams said the police department is very appreciative of its volunteers, who help with everything from administrative work to patrolling the streets.

"When I moved here, I wanted to do something to help the police run better, more efficient and more economically," Browne said, and Adams agreed it's what they have accomplished.

Browne, a retired operations manager of a locksmith company, moved to Cedar City in September 2005, and saw an article written by Adams in early 2006 asking for VIPS volunteers.

When the department first started the program, it had only two volunteers, Browne said. Now there are two women and four men and the volunteer force is looking to increase to 12 people.

Volunteers wear uniforms with VIP badges on them and drive police-owned vehicles marking them as volunteers, Browne said.

Those who applied and were accepted went through training to learn how to drive police vehicles, use police radios, learn dispatch codes and put to use their talents, Browne added.

For those interested in volunteering for either the city or the county VIPS program, Gower said one must be at least 21 with no criminal history, and be able to volunteer at least 16 hours per month for at least one year. He is looking to start with 10 volunteers.

Since Browne was the first local VIP, he now helps recruit new VIPS and conducts their interviews.

He said they are not looking for "wannabe cops," or people who want to be police officers, but they want people who are willing to help with the background aspects of law enforcement.

Gower said he is accepting applications through April 15 for people age 21 and older who have no criminal record. Applicants will go through a background check and receive training.

For questions or to pick up an application for the ICSO VIPS, call 867-7329 or visit the ICES office at 88 E. Fiddlers Canyon Road, suite F.