"Silent partner" helps Caddo deputies identify, recover stolen vehicles

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It's called the "silent partner" and with good reason. A new automatic license plate recognition system acquired by the Caddo Sheriff's Office can quietly do the work of more than 100 deputies in one shift.

Caddo Sheriff Steve Prator introduced the new system today and explained how the technology will help deputies combat criminal activity, enhance productivity, and improve officer safety.

Prator also thanked the Sheriff's Office's community partner, Red Ball Oxygen, and its owners, Gary and Larry Kennedy, for donating the $30,000 to purchase the new system.

Although ALPR technology has many uses, Prator said the Sheriff's Office will use it specifically to help identify and recover stolen vehicles in Shreveport and Caddo Parish. Over 1,100 vehicles were reported stolen in the two jurisdictions in 2007.

A sheriff's vehicle equipped with a license plate reader uses infrared cameras mounted to the top of the car to capture thousands of license plate images gathered during each patrol shift. Using character recognition software, a computer in the patrol car translates the images to text and is then matched to stolen vehicle data downloaded daily by the Caddo Sheriff's Office from a national databank. The computer alerts the deputy driving the car within seconds of passing a possible stolen vehicle. Deputies then verify the information prior to conducting a traffic stop.

"It's really about efficiency," Prator said. "With a license plate reader, we can check tens of thousands of plates per shift, and still fulfill our other duties, whereas before, a deputy whose only assignment was to check for stolen cars might only be able to check 200 plates.

"With this technology, criminals will have a harder time blending in among our law abiding citizens."

The system will be used to locate stolen cars but can also be checked against other databases, including those that hold felony warrants, sex offender information, or Amber Alerts. Using GPS satellite information, ALPR technology can also record historical data like the date, time and location of an individual scan, which can be helpful when investigating a crime or drug activity.