

System would track inmates

Service to give victims information could be ready by April

By DEANNA MARTIN
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

INDIANAPOLIS

An automated system that could be running by April would help crime victims and others track the status of inmates in Indiana jails or prisons, including whether they are released.

The Statewide Automated Victim Information and Notification Service, or SAVIN, will automatically call or e-mail victims or others who want to be notified about inmates' whereabouts. Real-time notices could

be sent out if convicts change facilities, have upcoming parole hearings or otherwise change status.

Gov. Mitch Daniels said 25 other states have such automated systems.

"This is an important step forward," he said.

Under the current victim notification system, people can call local officials to track offenders. But it can sometimes be a frustrating



DANIELS

process because there is not a single place to go for the information, said Correction Commissioner J. David Donahue. He said the new system would link counties with the state to provide easy-to-access information.

"You'll have a one-stop shop," Donahue said.

Using the new system, people can call a phone number or use the Internet to sign up for notifications. The system would call people's home, work or cell phone numbers, or send them e-mails any time the offenders' status changes.

The service will be offered in both English and Spanish, officials said, and crime victims can remain anonymous.

Indianapolis already uses an automated victim notification system, which it launched in 1997. Last year, more than 20,000 telephone or e-mail notifications were sent through the system. The statewide system is scheduled to begin in April, but full implementation will not be complete until 2008.

The state received \$1.25 million in federal funding, and provided about \$950,000 in matching funds to pay for the system.

New home sales plummet

By MARTIN CRUTSINGER
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON

Sales of new homes plunged in 2006 by the largest amount in 16 years as the nation's housing industry suffered through a sharp contraction after five boom years.

However, there have been some signs that the steep slide in housing may be coming to an end. For December, new home sales were up 4.8 percent, the second strong monthly gain after a 7.4 percent rise in November.

While those increases were better than expected, analysts cautioned that they were influenced by unusually warm weather in those two months.

The Commerce Department reported that sales of new single-family homes totaled 1.06 million units

for all of 2006, down 17.3 percent from the all-time high for sales of 1.28 million units set in 2005.

After setting sales records for five straight years, sales of both new and existing homes suffered sharp declines last year, and that has caused ripple effects throughout the whole economy.

Last year's plunge in new home sales was the biggest drop since a 17.8 percent drop since the recession year of 1990. Sales of existing homes fell by 8.4 percent to an annual rate of 6.48 million units, it was reported Thursday. That was the biggest decline in the sale of previously owned homes since 1989.

The median price of a new home sold in 2006 was up by 1.8 percent from 2005 but that price gain was far lower than the 9 percent jump in new home prices in 2005.

New home sales were up in all

parts of the country in December except the West which posted a 4.4 percent drop. Sales rose by 27.3 percent in the Northeast, 26.6 percent in the Midwest and a much smaller 0.3 percent in the South.

Separately, the Commerce Department reported that orders to U.S. factories for big-ticket manufactured goods rose in December by the largest amount in three months, led by a huge jump in demand for commercial aircraft and the biggest increase in orders for cars and trucks in more than two years.

New orders for durable goods rose 3.1 percent last month to a seasonally adjusted total of \$221.9 billion. The gain followed a 2.2 percent November increase and was the strongest showing since an 8.7 percent September advance.

BRIEFS STATE

INDIANAPOLIS

Utility sued for shutting off woman's power

The family of a woman who died last summer after her power was disconnected and her oxygen machine stopped pumping air is suing the utility.

Relatives of Sonya Abrahamson, 57, allege in a lawsuit filed Wednesday that her death was a direct result of Indianapolis Power & Light Co. shutting off electricity to her home without proper notice, said Hugh G. Baker Jr., the family's attorney.

Abrahamson, who suffered from chronic pulmonary disease, died July 6 after her electrically powered oxygen machine stopped. She was found unconscious and died later at a hospital.

IPL spokeswoman Crystal

Livers-Powers said the power was disconnected at Abrahamson's home because a utility bill totaling several hundred dollars had not been paid. She said the family also failed to return paperwork that would have alerted IPL about her medical needs.

Baker, however, contends the power company knew Abrahamson was on the oxygen machine because it had sent a worker to the home two months before her death to disconnect the service.

INDIANAPOLIS

Employee information posted on INDOT network

The names and Social Security numbers of about 4,000 employees of the Indiana Department of Transportation were inadvertently posted on an internal network com-

puter drive, the agency said Friday.

In a letter sent to the workers Friday, INDOT Commissioner Karl Browning said the file was available to any employee with computer access and could have been viewed by a limited number of third-party contractors with access to the drive. The file was posted on the drive sometime between Sept. 6 and Dec. 4 last year.

"The file was removed from all computer systems and our Information Technology staff is performing an extensive search of all other hard drives for any lists containing this type of information," Browning said in the letter.

The letter asked employees to contact an agency official if they knew of electronic or print files containing personal information that was not secured.

BRIEFS NATION

WASHINGTON

Amendment would punish illegal hiring

Federal contractors caught hiring illegal immigrants would be banned from government work for up to a decade under sanctions the Senate added unanimously to a minimum wage bill.

The Senate's action Thursday, pushed by Republican senators, was this Congress' first foray into immigration regulation, and it prompted an outcry of opposition from business groups.

By a vote of 94-0, the Senate approved an amendment by Sen. Jeff Sessions, R-Ala., that would impose a contract ban on compa-

nies, even if they inadvertently hired illegal workers, from seven to 10 years. The ban would not be subject to appeal in court, but the federal government could waive it for national security reasons.

CHARLESTON, S.C.

Diocese to pay millions in sexual abuse claims

The Roman Catholic Diocese of Charleston announced Friday it has agreed to settle child sex abuse claims, designating as much as \$12 million for damages.

The class-action settlement between the diocese and attorneys representing possible vic-

tims has been given initial approval by a judge, said Larry Richter, an attorney representing four people claiming abuse.

It is not clear how many victims there are. In 2004, diocese officials said there had been 45 credible abuse allegations in the state between 1950 and 2002 against 21 priests, one deacon and one deacon candidate. Recent negotiations revealed allegations against at least 26 priests, Richter said.

"What you find in this area is people can't just be molested and the next day step up to the plate and say 'I'm a victim,'" Richter said. "It's often after a very painful time in life."

ATTENTION

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