

# Tucson Citizen

## Tucson cops, local software to help in D.C. sniper probe



Hsinchun Chen shows Tucson police Detective Tim Petersen (right) how to use COPLINK software in January 2001. Chen led a University of Arizona Artificial Intelligence Lab team in developing COPLINK software. Peterson is one of two Tucson officers who will travel to Washington, D.C., to assist officers there in the use of COPLINK.

*Citizen file photo*

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Tucson Citizen

Oct. 23, 2002

#### **A computer database system that Tucson police employ in crime investigations will be used in the hunt for the Washington, D.C.-area sniper or snipers.**

Two Tucson police officers were scheduled to leave for Washington today to assist investigators in using the system.

Federal officials asked Tucson police for help in using the system, COPLINK. It allows investigators to feed leads and other data on a case into a computer system, and a software program then provides advanced analytical and search capabilities for investigators. Lt. Jennifer Schroeder and Detective Tim Petersen will assist investigators in Washington with installation, training and operation involving COPLINK, developed at the University of Arizona. The Montgomery (Md.) County Police Department, through the Justice Department, requested the help, said Sgt. Judy Altieri, a police spokeswoman here. Four advisers from Knowledge Computing Corp., the local firm that provides support for COPLINK, will accompany the local officers.

So much information has been generated by the sniper investigation that investigators need some way to sort it, Schroeder said. "They are having trouble making sense of it all," she said. "And we would love to be part of catching this person."

Knowledge Computing is an investment company founded two years ago and primarily funded by Diamond Ventures, said the company's president, Robert Griffin. "We maintain very strong ties with the university," he said. The technology company has an agreement with UA to commercialize technology from the Artificial Intelligence Lab, he added. "So we will be there to provide analytic support," he said. "Our technology helps them sort through all the information they have acquired." Griffin said the computer system works so well that dozens of crimes have been solved in Tucson and other parts of the country. A case last year involving an attempted murder was solved with the system, Griffin said. Data on the crime and individuals involved were put into COPLINK, and associations were made, Griffin said. Suspects were arrested within hours of the crime.

Also, he said the company was recently in Des Moines, Iowa, to train law officers to use the system. During the two-day training program, four suspects in previous crimes were identified and arrested.

COPLINK was founded by Hsinchun Chen, head of UA's Artificial Intelligence Lab, Griffin said. The Police Department got involved when Schroeder and Petersen received a grant from the National Institute of Justice to create a law enforcement program. The program was started in 1997 with the development of a prototype for technology engineering, Chen said. The idea of applying it to police work came from a former student, Brad Cochran, a Tucson police sergeant at the time. The work produced a good tool, he said. "This is a very unusual and successful program," Chen said. Most of the success is due to "working with such a progressive law enforcement agency as the Tucson Police Department." Chen said the computer system "is being explored for the use by the federal government in the work on terrorism."

#### HOW COPLINK WORKS:

The system digs through databases and reports to pick out connections among suspects, vehicles, crimes, locations and other data. It gives police the capability, with limited information, to find investigative leads they don't get anywhere else.

Simply put, it searches separate databases at various agencies and returns information based on a query. For example: If a robbery were committed by a person identified as Ben, who was driving a white van, and Ben was known to associate with a gang member named Beetle, the investigator would input that information. COPLINK would search the database and list all cases Ben was involved in previously, as well as all of Beetle's cases and information on any associated witnesses or suspects in each of those cases.