

# THE IMPORTANCE OF ROBUST SEARCHING CAPABILITIES

Detectives at the Geauga County Sheriff's Office in Ohio learned the importance of powerful searching capabilities in their public safety software when they used Spillman Flex to help solve thefts and apprehend suspects in a crime ring targeting homes and businesses across two states.

During a routine check of a pawned-goods information website, Detective Juanita Vetter noticed something unusual. A Geauga County resident had traveled 40 miles to Cleveland to pawn a chainsaw, even though there was a good market for used chainsaws in and around Geauga County. Vetter decided to investigate to determine why the resident was traveling so far to sell the equipment.

The Flex system stores data in an open, centralized database known as the Hub, which enables users to easily search the system for accurate, up-to-date information. Vetter searched Flex property tables for the word "Stihl," the brand name that manufactured the pawned chainsaw.

The Flex system retrieved a list of records that contained the word "Stihl" and Vetter noticed that one of the records was for a stolen chainsaw that matched the model of the one sold in the Cleveland pawn shop. The chainsaw had been reported stolen on the same day that it appeared in the Cleveland pawn shop.

Vetter was confident that the pawned chainsaw had been stolen, but she needed to investigate further to create an airtight case.

Vetter said she contacted Stihl, which keeps records on each piece of equipment they sell. Stihl representatives were able to look up the serial number for the chainsaw sold to the Geauga County resident. The serial number of the chainsaw that had been reported stolen matched the serial number of the chainsaw found in the pawnshop.

Although it seemed like a simple, open-and-shut case, Vetter did not yet realize that she had stumbled across a crime ring that stretched far beyond Geauga County boundaries. When Vetter questioned



the resident, he told her he was pawning the chainsaw for a friend because his friend did not have a driver license, which is required at many shops in order to pawn items.

His friend, Fisher, worked as a frozen food deliveryman for a company based in Chagrin Falls, Ohio. Vetter secured a routing slip that showed where Fisher had made deliveries and called the residents. Many said they were missing items from their homes.

Vetter said that once residents left him alone to load their freezers, he would steal items from their homes. Fisher had stolen a chainsaw, a leaf blower, and a digital camera out of residences as he made deliveries throughout western Pennsylvania.

“Everywhere this guy went, he would be stealing things and pawning them,” Vetter said.

An investigation into the new suspect revealed that he recruited others, including his brother and several friends, to steal from stores and homes. Fisher and his accomplices stole thousands of dollars of electronics and landscaping equipment to fund their heroin addictions.

“We could pick any day of the week and follow them,” Vetter said. “We’d find them trading flat-screen TVs for heroin.”

In total, eight individuals were charged with 98 felony counts including theft, burglary, and receiving stolen property. They received sentences ranging from eight to 24 months in prison. Their cars were also seized as criminal tools.

Vetter said Flex’s searching capabilities were a critical part of solving the case.

“Spillman Flex is unbelievable,” she said. “With just a little bit of info, we can use Flex to put [the facts] together.”

Detective Jon Bilicic, who assisted Vetter on the case, said that without Flex, identifying the crime ring would have been much more difficult. The software is a valuable time-saver for the Geauga County Sheriff’s Office, he said, which is responsible for patrolling an area of more than 400 square miles.

“We would have had to flip through all those (theft) reports manually if we didn’t have Flex,” he said. “Flex’s search options are very user-friendly, and our job would have definitely been harder if we didn’t have it.”

