

METRICH drug task force adds mobile application

The decades-long fight against illegal drugs across a 10-county north central Ohio just added a new high-tech tool.

The METRICH Enforcement Unit, which began in Mansfield and Richland County in 1986, has recently added an online application, the first of its kind for a multi-county drug task force in Ohio.

"We've had the website for years and it has been our intent to catch up with the 21st century by offering a new online app platform for our citizens," said Mansfield police Chief Keith Porch, the task force project director.

"It mimics our website in terms of drug awareness and how to report a tip," Porch said. "But now it will be at the citizens' fingertips."

The chief said the app will provide useful information to the public, such as drug education, addiction resources, and helpful links.

Users will be able to view press releases, and calendar events which are tailored to the specific counties within the METRICH region, Porch said.

METRICH is the first drug task force in Ohio to have a mobile app. But the technology has had success in other locations, including Scott County, Minn. and the southwest section of that state.

The technology is a far cry from the organization's launch 36 years ago.

METRICH began as a cooperative effort between Mansfield police, Richland County Sheriff's Office and the county prosecutor when the two law enforcement agencies learned they were about to raid the same location.

It has grown over the years to include more than 40 communities in Richland, Ashland, Crawford, Knox, Hancock, Huron, Marion, Morrow, Seneca and Wyandot counties, funded by local agencies grants from the Ohio Office of Criminal Justice Services, which has encouraged regional cooperation and efficiency.

Law enforcement officers in those counties meet, share information, resources and assist one another as needed in drug raids and arrests. The task force remains decentralized, but cooperative.

The app will help streamline citizen tips, creating a more efficient process, according to Porch.

"The app will allow tips to be submitted online, which will be referred to detectives in the county it comes from," he said. "It will be easier than calling in to a tip line and leaving an anonymous message."

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