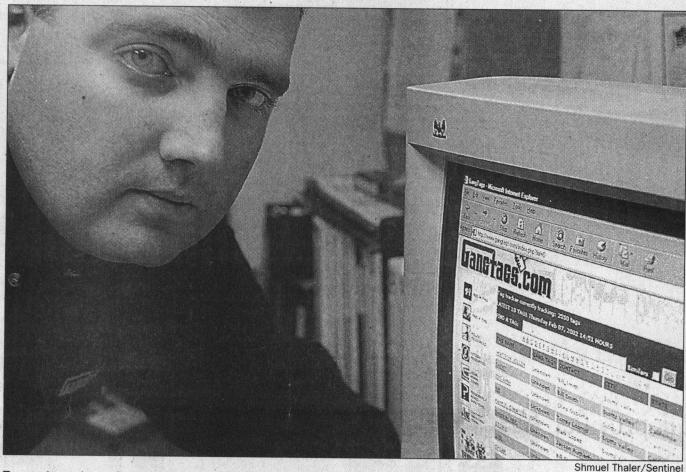
TAGTEAN



Torrey Loomis, a Scotts Valley police detective, hopes his brainchild, Gangtags.com, will coordinate tagging enforcement on a regional level. He hopes to sell the service to authorities around the nation.

New online service tracks vandals' signature marks Crime & Criminal - Graffiti By JASON SCHILLTY 212-02

By JASON SCHULTZ

SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

A Scotts Valley police detective has invented an Internet-based service that could help law enforcement in the county - and nationwide - crack down on graffiti.

Gangtags.com is the brain child of detective Torrey Loomis.

Loomis, working with a computer programming firm, the Step One Group from Monterrey, Mexico, has developed the Web site database of graffiti over the past two years. Loomis pitched the Web site Thursday to representatives of all Santa Cruz County's law enforcement agencies, and said he hopes to sell the service to police agencies nationwide.

The site catalogs the names, or "tags," that illegal graffiti artists like to spray paint on walls and property. Because graffiti artists, or "taggers," like to gain notoriety, Loomis said, they don't change their tags and will often spray paint the same name in as many

places as possible. Every time a "tag" is reported, Loomis explained, an officer enters the tag into the Web site's database, along with the location of the tag, date it was found and a contact name of an officer involved in the case.

Loomis said police sharing information through gangtags.com could lead to bands of graffiti artists, called 'tagging crews,' being charged with strings of vandalism incidents instead of isolated crimes.

Other departments can search the database to see if a particular word has been found spray painted elsewhere, and if any arrests have been made.

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In Capitola recently, a teen was arrested on suspicion of tagging several shops at Capitola Mall. Capitola detective Cliff Sloma said investigators believe the teen responsible for much of that graffiti may be connected to the "Never Out Sober" tagging crew, a band that several law enforcement agencies said has tagged property in their jurisdictions.

Loomis said the program will cost county departments \$900 for the first year. Larger departments such as the Los Angeles Police Department would have to pay \$18,000

Watsonville police Capt. Manny Solano worried about the cost, saying that city is already hiring a graffiti specialist who will be paid \$50,000 to find graffiti, document it and clean it up. Loomis said cities can recoup the costs because they can solve tagging cases and get thousands of dollars in restitution from the taggers.

In Watsonville, a teen was arrested last month on suspicion of etching tags into dozens of shop windows along Main Street. Police estimated damage at \$29,000.

Loomis said he is trying to sell the program to the county agencies as a test run. He will fine tune the service using their input, and then sell it around the country. He said he hopes to have all San Francisco Bay Area counties subscribing to the service by the end of the year.

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