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Clallam County turns to technology to process fingerprints for pistol licenses

By Rob Ollikainen
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PORT ANGELES -- Clallam County is ditching an old-school method of processing fingerprints for pistol license applications in favor of digital technology.

The three county commissioners Tuesday approved a user agreement with the State Patrol for a high-tech scanning system that will send digital images to a State Patrol identification center at the click of a mouse.

After staff is trained in about a month, the county will install the L SCAN Guardian live scan machine in the lobby of the Clallam County Sheriff's Office, Chief Civil Sheriff's Deputy Alice Hoffman said.

"We're very excited about having this equipment in our lobby," Hoffman told the commissioners.

The scanner will process an estimated 900 pistol license applications and another 150 general-purpose applications per year, Hoffman said.

Plans for scanner

It will also serve as a backup to the scanners that corrections officers use to take fingerprints of inmates as they are booked into the Clallam County jail and the Clallam County Juvenile Services Detention Facility.

Commissioners Mike Doherty, Steve Tharinger and Mike Chapman approved the agreement by unanimous vote.

A grant from the Department of Justice is paying for the \$18,985 technology, which includes computer accessories and training, Hoffman said.

The machine is expected to dramatically decrease the time it takes to apply for a concealed pistol license.

It usually takes about 30 days for an applicant to be fingerprinted with ink and get a license. The prints are sent via postal service to the state.

Less time to get permit

Hoffman said it could take less than a day for an applicant to get a response using the scanner.

Last year, another grant paid for a fingerprint scanner at the juvenile detention center in west Port Angeles.

Hoffman said the machine looks like a cabinet with a desktop computer on top. The applicant places his or her hand on top of the scanner.

Besides the long lag times associated with the ink method, the State Patrol returns about 10 percent of the samples because of such flaws as having too much or too little ink, Hoffman said.

"It's going to really help us out quite a bit," Hoffman said.

"We'll know right then and there that we've got a good print."

The digital fingerprints will be connected to an applicant's driver's license in a database.

The Sheriff's Office now provides concealed pistol license applications on its revamped website at www.clallam.net/Sheriff/firearms.html.

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