

**Watch Talk Wednesdays
Wednesday, February 23, 2011
Montgomery County Crime Stoppers**

Officer Joel Gordon, former Montgomery County Crime Stoppers Coordinator and current patrolman with the Shenandoah Police Department, gave a presentation on the Montgomery County Crime Stoppers program for about 25 residents at the February 23, 2011 Watch Talk Wednesday program presented by the Neighborhood Services Department of The Woodlands Township. Notes from Officer Gordon's presentation are below.

More information may be found on their web site at www.montgomerycountycrimestoppers.org/.

To report a tip to Montgomery County Crime Stoppers, call 1-800-392-STOP (7867).

To contact the Montgomery County Crime Stoppers Coordinator, Deputy Brandy Bice, call 936-539-7867.

Here are the staff notes as interpreted from the program:

Crime Stoppers is a way for the public, news media and law enforcement to all work together to help solve crimes. It helps to put drug dealers and other criminals out of business. A person providing a tip is able to report the information anonymously without having to go to court to testify. All tips may be taken, but rewards are only provided for felonies. Money for rewards is provided from a fee that Montgomery County probationers pay. Officer Gordon said that the main reason people call is for the anonymity, not the money. Statistics were provided to confirm that the majority of people don't pick up their reward.

When someone calls in a tip to Montgomery County Crime Stoppers, the call is answered 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year, by a trained call taker at a call center that works for multiple Crime Stoppers' agencies. The caller does not provide a name. There is no caller ID on the phone system. The call taker enters the tip information into special software and provides the caller with an identification number that the tipster can use to call back later to communicate with the Montgomery County Crime Stoppers Coordinator, who is a Montgomery County Sheriff's Deputy and is the only employee of Montgomery County Crime Stoppers. The

Crime Stoppers Coordinator receives the information from the call center and passes the information on to the appropriate law enforcement personnel to verify. The tipster remains anonymous throughout the process.

Once law enforcement verifies the information and makes an arrest, law enforcement notifies the Crime Stoppers Coordinator. The Coordinator takes the information to a volunteer Montgomery County Crime Stoppers Board. The Board is provided guidelines from the state as to how much of a reward should be given. They determine the reward and vote on it. Once a reward is allocated, the Coordinator waits for the tipster to call back. When they do, they have to provide their identification number for that tip. The Coordinator then tells the tipster what bank drive-through to go to. The tipster is provided a code to pick up the reward and does not have to provide further identification. The Crime Stoppers Coordinator and law enforcement never know who provided the tip.

The Montgomery County Crime Stoppers Board meetings are open to the public and are generally held at Tai Pei restaurant on I-45 on the 3rd Tuesday of the month. Anyone interested in volunteering or attending the meeting should contact the Montgomery County Crime Stoppers Coordinator, Deputy Brandy Bice at 936-539-7867 to confirm the time and location. Volunteer Board members have to go through a criminal background check.

Tips may also be passed on through a secure web site or by SMS text, both of which are explained on the web site. The tipster is not tracked and still remains anonymous.

Additionally, Crime Stoppers provides the Featured Felons page in the local papers weekly and the page is also posted on their web site. Officer Gordon noted that occasionally the Featured Felon you see may have already turned him or herself in, posted bond and is awaiting a court date, so if you see the person, he or she may no longer be wanted and you would not receive a reward in that case.

Montgomery County Crime Stoppers is a 501c3 non-profit. It uses donations for operational items, such as advertisements and promotional items. These help with awareness and education about the program. Donations may be made online.

The web site also provides further information on Blue Warrants, Missing Persons, Cold Cases, definitions of legal terms, and Kid Chat. Kid Chat is also a Crime Stoppers program, but it is run through the Conroe Independent School District Police. They may give rewards for misdemeanors and even for potential counseling needs. Tips are passed on to school personnel or law enforcement to handle, depending on the issue.

Questions:

When do you call 9-1-1 and when do you call Crime Stoppers? Officer Gordon said that if a crime is happening now, it is best to call 9-1-1. If you see something reported in the news and you have information about it, and you don't want to testify or are worried about retaliation, you can call pass on the information by calling Crime Stoppers.

Once you call law enforcement directly, instead of through Crime Stoppers, law enforcement has your information, and Crime Stoppers can't help you remain anonymous. As a result, you may be called in to assist with the case.

Is it more difficult to convict someone when the information comes through Crime Stoppers?

Yes, it may be, but if you are worried about retribution, you might not have called at all.

How long does someone have to collect an award? Rewards are kept for about 2 months before being put back into a restricted reward account.

For further information on how you can help, please see the Montgomery County Crime Stoppers web site, or contact the Montgomery County Crime Stoppers Coordinator.