

Sting Operation

The court would setup a sting operation whereas wanted persons appear and are arrested. Defendants are brought before a judge immediately.

Arrest warrant coordination between the court and law enforcement is critical. Ability to check for warrant status 'just before arrest' is also crucial. For northern courts, the location of the sting operation is important if the majority of your arrest warrants are for defendants downstate. They may not want to travel to Northern Michigan for whatever enticement you used to attract them.

In the Gaylord area the courts and State Police coordinated a sting operation for all persons that had an arrest warrant issued by a court in Otsego County. The process was as follows:

1. Files were double checked for warrant status
2. A 'solicitation letter' was mailed to the last known address of the defendant, advising him/her they were one of the lucky 200 that can win a new snowmobile. If the key mailed to them fits the ignition of one of the five new snowmobiles they can take the machine home with them. The defendant was advised the only cost to them was sales tax that would have to be paid.
3. Defendants were advised to bring \$400 with them to cover the sales tax. (This amount was stated so a defendant had bail money if, after arraignment, the defendant plead not guilty and bond was necessary.)
4. The court used the local Knights of Columbus (K of C) hall east of Gaylord. A local snowmobile shop loaned 10 snowmobiles and a large amount of snowmobile clothing and other equipment to add to the decor.
5. A portable courtroom was set up in the back area 'out of sight and sound' of the main snowmobile area.
6. Plain clothed MSP, Sheriff and City officers assisted.
7. A special radio frequency was established between the remote location and 911 center to file check all defendants just before arrest.
8. Computer and Fax connections were established between the K of C hall and court office for access to the court's data base.
9. Court warrant files were on location. A court clerk was at the courts' offices as insurance if additional paperwork was needed and not available at the remote location.
10. The sting operation went as scheduled for an eight hour period on a specific day.
11. Defendants were arrested during the on-going sting operation and escorted to the back section of the K of C hall for an immediate arraignment and plea.

Although a number of arrests were made and cases closed, the court and law enforcement deemed the project not successful for the following reason: the amount of preparation v. the number of files closed. At the debriefing it was the consensus of the group that since most warrants were for defendants downstate, if the sting operation was moved downstate and coordinated with a local court in that area, more arrests would probably have resulted.