

By Michael K. Jeanes, Clerk of the Superior Court

\$1 Million Released to Victims of Crime

Tens of thousands of criminal cases make their way through the Superior Court in Maricopa County each year. Many cases result in restitution orders to compensate victims. Unfortunately, victims often move or their status changes with no notification to the Clerk's Office. This results in the Clerk holding restitution money that was paid but can't be forwarded to the victim.

Two years ago the Clerk's Office partnered with the Maricopa County Attorney's Office to locate victims of crime and get them the funds they are owed. Volunteer investigators in the County Attorney's office use their expertise and resources to locate victims during non-duty hours. When an updated address is obtained, the Clerk's Office sends the funds. A successful location can take multiple attempts, but when an address is validated it results in getting money back in the hands of those it belongs to – the victims of crime.

When the program began in 2010, the Clerk's Office was holding more than \$3 million in pending restitution for more than 4,000 victims with incorrect mailing addresses. In the first week of the joint program, the offices located 76 victims with funds on hold. The program has now resulted in victims cashing \$1 million in restitution checks. Last year the Victim Locate Program was awarded an Achievement Award from the National Association of Counties, providing national recognition for Maricopa County's innovative program. With continued success locating victims and outreach to victims to keep their addresses updated with the Clerk, the program could become unnecessary in the future.

Prior to this program, approximately \$74,000 per month in court-ordered restitution was not mailed to victims because of invalid addresses on file with the Clerk's Office. The Clerk's Office cannot hold restitution funds indefinitely. If unclaimed and the rightful owner is not found within the statutory timeframes, the funds are sent to the State Department of Revenue as unclaimed property.

In addition to the Victim-Locate Program, the Clerk's Office has a link on its website called "Finding Funds" that allows individuals and businesses to enter their name or the name of their business to search for court-ordered restitution monies or assets owing to them. If funds exist, forms can be printed and completed and either faxed or mailed to the Clerk's Criminal Financial Obligations Unit. To search for funds on the Clerk's website, go to http://www.clerkofcourt.maricopa.gov/Unclaimed/default_new.asp.

Victims should update their address with the Clerk in writing by sending their name, case number(s) and old and new address information by mail to: Clerk of the Court, ATTN:

CFO, 201 W. Jefferson, Phoenix, AZ 85003 or by emailing their information to CFOResponse@mail.maricopa.gov.