

Imagine you are out with a friend and decide to catch the latest thriller at your local theater. After leaving you are walking to your car when you are approached by two individuals in masks who produce a gun and demand you give them your wallet. You willingly comply, but they don't stop with just your wallet. They take your watch, rings, and your friend's purse. You can't speak; you shake uncontrollably and can not think clearly. After threatening you they run off into the night. You report the incident to your local law enforcement agency and after some time has passed you begin to feel a rush of emotions. You feel angry, violated, distrustful, and maybe even paranoid. The experience permanently alters your life and way you go about your daily routines. Your life is changed forever.

Thankfully law enforcement is able to capture the suspects and you will have a chance to face these criminals in court. This story is of course fictitious and not based on an actual case. Prior to 1993 a victim may have had difficulty keeping informed on certain matters such as court dates, information on charges filed, and may not have had input on decisions regarding plea bargains.

On November 3, 1992, the Rights of Crime Victims was enacted and became effective upon proclamation of the Governor on January 14, 1993. The people of Colorado felt so strongly about the rights of victims they are documented not only in the Colorado Revised Statutes but also amended into the Colorado State Constitution, article II, section 16a. These documents outline how victims are to be treated and specifically what rights they have regarding the legal system, referrals, and compensation, in the event they are the victim of certain crimes.

The Weld County Sheriff's Office provides victims of certain crimes information detailing what they may be entitled to including reimbursement for medical expenses, loss of earnings, funeral expenses, transportation, financial assistance, among a long list of additional assistance and referrals. The Sheriff's Office has a dedicated victim services unit which is staffed by two full time employees and seven volunteers. The unit provides victim advocacy services for all persons who reside in unincorporated areas of the county, and within towns the Sheriff's Office provides law enforcement services to. These services are available 24 hours a day as needed. A brochure detailing the rights of crime victims is available by visiting our website at www.weldsheriff.com.

This year I had the pleasure to report to the citizens' of Weld County that the crime rate for 2006 dropped 15% overall from 2005. Fewer crimes mean fewer Weld County victims. For crimes tracked by my office only one crime showed an increase; that crime was rape. I realize a number of reasons combined contribute to any crime decrease, but one area I feel particularly strong about is the incarceration of repeat offenders. As you may have read recently the Weld County jail is overcrowded. While this presents its own challenges internally I believe it's a good thing; if criminals are locked up they can't be in the community committing new crimes.

This year victim rights week is April 22 - 28, 2007. On Friday, April 20, Aims College in Greeley will host a Victim Rights Week Event from 8:30 am -2 pm. In the past this

annual event has included between 60 and 80 participants. The morning will include information about human trafficking provided by the Colorado Regional Community Policing Institute. A luncheon will begin at 11:45am. Jerry Garner, Greeley Police Chief, will be the master of ceremonies speaking on behalf of victims as well as a victim speaker. For more information or to register, call Cecil O'Farrell at 970-350-9667.

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