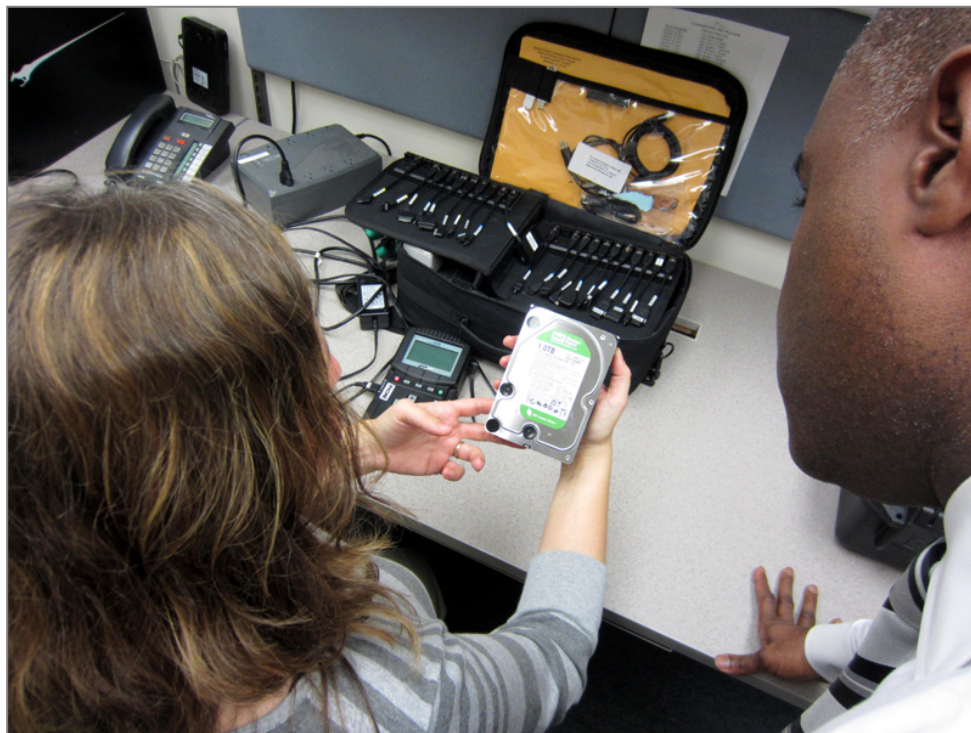


ECPO Forms New Cyber Crimes Unit

By Nicole Graves-Watson, Community Justice Coordinator



Advances in technology have changed the way the Essex County Prosecutor's Office fights crime. In December 2010, the Essex County Prosecutor's Office formed a Cyber Crimes Unit to investigate child pornography, computer fraud and the use of the Internet and other technology in crimes.

"Whether we're dealing with homicides, rapes, domestic violence, drug cases, online predators, child pornography or cyber stalking, technology is often the key to effective crime fighting in the 21st century," said Acting Prosecutor, Robert D. Laurino.

Richard Gould, an FBI trained expert on cyber crimes serves as the Lieutenant for the Unit. The Cyber Crimes Unit solves traditional crimes using computer forensics. The Unit also educates members of the community on cyber bullying.

Once limited to name-calling, today's bullying has morphed into cyber space and often involves much more complicated issues. "Students are now using technology to bully each other with dire consequences," said Lieutenant Gould.

Very often students take semi-nude or nude photographs and send them to a boyfriend or girlfriend. Once the relationship goes sour, one person or the other may post the photographs online, Gould said.

“We’re seeing an unprecedented amount of young people committing cyber bullying offenses. The creation of the Cyber Crimes Unit has definitely helped with investigations along with educating young people of the dangers,” said Assistant Prosecutor Gwendolyn Williams, Director of ECPO’s Juvenile Trial Unit.

The Internet Crime Complaint Center, a group that refers victims of cyber crimes to law enforcement agencies, reported that it received 14,520 complaints from New Jersey in 2009, up from 8,270 complaints in 2008.

The Cyber Crimes Unit works with local, state and federal law enforcement agencies. Many local police departments do not have the resources to investigate computer related matters and rely on the expertise of the Unit.

“The Essex County Prosecutor’s Cyber Crimes Unit provided useful information on a recent case by extracting text messages between two potential suspects,” said Lieutenant Jim Wavra from the Maplewood Police Department. The information was gathered to determine if the suspects communicated about a robbery.