

Kidnapped senior needed IU-patented home security system

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Family and friends of a 75-year-old California grandmother beaten and kidnapped from her home last week might have known of the crime within moments if a device patented by an Indiana University researcher had been in use.

If Sandy Vinge had been using The Portal Monitor developed by Indiana University professor L. Jean Camp when kidnapped from her home, photographs taken at the victim's front door step would have been forwarded instantaneously to a pre-selected group of her closest friends and family members.

The device connects a home doorbell sensor to porch cameras that forward headshot images to a hybrid personal digital assistant. The specialized PDA then sends the images to cell phones in use by neighbors, family members or other pre-determined contacts.

Instead, Vinge was beaten, bound and held captive in the trunk of a car for 26 hours, allegedly by three young adults arrested after being stopped for a routine traffic violation while driving the victim's car.

"It can work any place with cellular phone service," said Camp, director of IU's Security Informatics Program. "It takes three photos a minute, and if the user doesn't override the function, the photos are sent automatically to select individuals."

Camp said the device also provides assets for families in non-crime

scenarios such as when an elderly person may need assistance through social interaction with family supporters. It also addresses issues of wandering with respect to dementia patients, she said.

"There's the elderly person being pressured by the 'bad cousin' to loan money, for example," she said. "In this instance, a family member can be alerted and then use a social interaction to resolve the situation."

If wandering is a concern for a user suffering from dementia, they likely would not have the cognitive abilities to override the "send photo" function. The user's contacts would then receive photos immediately of the person leaving home.

The Portal Monitor could become an important privacy-enhanced security tool for the nation's expanding aging population, Camp pointed out. There are more than 37.3 million Americans 65 or older, and the number is expected to double by 2030. Of that current number nearly one in three live alone, and most of those people are women.

The security system was developed through the assistance of a National Science Foundation grant which founded the Ethical Technology in the Homes of Seniors (ETHOS) Laboratory (ethos.indiana.edu/). Research continues in ETHOS on The Portal Monitor, including work in relation to the attitudes of seniors on privacy issues. ETHOS gerontologist Lesa Huber, clinical assistant professor in IU's School of Health, Physical Education and Recreation, noted that elders are particularly vulnerable to door-to-door frauds and scams.

"We feel this system addresses so many types of security issues," she said. "And we believe it could become an extremely affordable system since even obsolete cell phone components can be adapted for use."

Source: Indiana University

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