

Alton Police Internet Purchase Exchange Area enhances safety, already well received

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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ALTON - The 24-hour designated surveillance area for safe internet exchange transactions at the Alton Police Department is getting brisk use since it was recently established, **Lt. Seth Stinnett**, said.

The signs were recently placed for people who either buy or sell items with an origination on the internet. Other law enforcement departments throughout the area have established these transaction points in their parking lots, including the Madison County Sheriff's Department and they have all been well received by the public.

There are two signs now placed in the main parking lot close to the judge's parking area in the Donald E. Sandidge Law Enforcement Center parking lot, just west of the entrance to the building at 1700 E. Broadway in Alton for residents to use. The signs have some deep words of protection: "Internet Purchase Exchange Location. This Area Is Under 24-hour Video Surveillance."

Stinnett reinforced that people are welcome to come inside and make their transactions, too, not just in the parking lot. Each day, 24 hours a day, there are officers behind the windows and visible in the command center. The officers inside are available to for any consultation behind the windows.

Several law enforcement departments established the internet safety exchange areas in their parking lots after a young Southern Illinois University student Taylor Clark was shot and killed after he had driven to Hazelwood, Mo., to meet a potential buyer. He had posted his car for sale on Craigslist and was responding to an inquiry.

Stinnett said those in the department highly encourage people to use the services they have available for safe protection during internet transactions.

"If you feel a little bit safer with a large amount of currency, come to the front lobby and tell the desk officer so they know why you are there so you know you can safely exchange or barter a trade for that currency," he said. "The exchange of currency and items involving the internet with people who have never met seems to be on the rise and this allows a nice, safe spot to buy, sell or exchange property."

Stinnett said an immediate red flag that the transaction may be a scam or a person may potentially be a victim of a crime is that they don't want to conduct the transaction in a law enforcement parking lot or inside the center.

"We have all heard stories on the news, locally or nationally of people buying or selling high-priced items and people stealing the items and taking their money," he said. "This makes a lot of sense to do the transactions this way. We have seen a lot of other departments nationally and even the Madison County Sheriff's Department establish these locations. We grabbed the idea and tried to utilize it. Who knows how many crimes this will prevent."

Stinnett recommends that people never provide a home address to anyone that someone doesn't know in one of the internet transactions, but make the exchange in a safe place like a law enforcement parking lot.

“This makes it safer for everybody,” the long-time Alton Police officer and resident, said.