



MICHAEL PEREZ / Inquirer Staff Photographer

The crime-mapping program Pinpoint is projected on (from left) FBI Agents Bill Shute and Michael Carbonell and Phila. Detective Pat Smith. Shute designed the software, which is used extensively by local and national law enforcement agencies to locate and identify people of interest in crimes.

A Nifty Little CRIMEBUSTER

At \$39.95, it pays dividends for police.

By John Shiffman
INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

When three men were shot in a Southwest Philadelphia bar last month, reportedly in front of 20 people, police were met with a familiar response: Nobody saw anything.

So city detectives turned to a \$39.95 tool that's helped them solve scores of shootings and at least a dozen homicides since late 2004, including the killings of a police officer and a 9-year-old boy.

The tool is a sophisticated computer mapping program developed by a local FBI agent, Bill Shute, who came up with the idea one weekend afternoon while watching a cable-TV documentary about the former East German secret police, the Stasi.

Shute's computer program identifies likely wit-

nesses, informants and suspects, then plots their locations on a map.

"It's a highly effective way to find people who may be willing to work with us," said Tom Press, who supervises the warrant unit in the state court system in Philadelphia.

The FBI program, called Pinpoint, cost only \$39.95 because Shute uses off-the-shelf Microsoft software and enters already-compiled city, state and federal data from court and investigative records.

Blue dots on the map mark the homes of people wanted for probation violations. Green dots note people wanted on bench warrants. Large red dots represent people wanted for violent crimes. Other symbols mark sites of homicides, nonlethal shoot-

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A better way to fight crime — for \$39.95

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ings, sexual predators, community leaders, places of worship and informants.

A click of the mouse on a dot on the map brings up detailed information on a person or event.

When a crime occurs, Shute plots the neighborhood, drawing a circle with about a 400-yard radius, looking for people to question: likely witnesses, suspects, informants. Then police, warrant officers and FBI hit the streets and press those people for information.

"What Pinpoint does is to take a very large city and make it small," Shute said.

The system works, authorities say, because criminals in Philadelphia tend to operate in their own neighborhoods.

"You wonder why anyone didn't think of this sooner," said Joe Fox, chief of detectives for the city police.

The use of crime-mapping by law enforcement is not new. But many other mapping programs cost much more, require days of training to master, and focus on long-term, analytical needs. A recent Camden crime-mapping system, for example, cost more than \$200,000. A related FBI program cost \$1.4 million, Shute said.

"Sometimes the cheapest and simplest way is the best," said city police Detective Pat Smith, who is Shute's partner on a violent-crimes task force. "We're not working harder, just smarter."

Agents and police use the program on the streets virtually every day, FBI task-force supervisor Michael Carbonell said.

The program has won Shute national recognition, and he recently briefed FBI Director Robert Mueller on the project.

John Gillies, chief of the violent crimes section for the FBI's national office in

Washington, said agents in 51 of the bureau's 56 offices have used Pinpoint.

"We hope to have it fully implemented in every field office in the next two years," he said.

Shute, 35, credits veteran city detectives and warrant officers with teaching him how the streets work and where to find relevant records. He shares their frustration at having reluctant witnesses.

"People are out there who know things but are scared to talk to us," Shute said. "We have to find them."

Pinpoint also has helped the FBI rebuild its informant base, which dwindled after the Sept. 11 attacks, when 13 of the 26 agents on the violent-crimes squad were transferred to terrorism units.

But since 2004, Pinpoint has helped the FBI triple its informant base in Philadelphia, Shute said. (He declined to provide precise numbers.)

Pinpoint's primary purpose, though, is to help solve crimes quickly.

Two of Pinpoint's biggest successes were in 2005. The program developed leads that helped city police make arrests in the slaying of Philadelphia Police Officer Terrence V. Flomo, who was shot in his car, and the slaying of Wander DeJesus, a 9-year-old who was shot while sitting in a van waiting for a friend.

Late last month, city police used Pinpoint to identify potential witnesses in the slayings of Arthur Jennings, 20; Claude Snelling, 30; and Jamar Thompson, 31, who were killed after an argument at Abay's Wheeler Bar in Southwest Philadelphia.

"We take the info, give it to Philly Homicide, and let them do their job," Shute said.

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