

Daily Journal

NORTHEAST MISSISSIPPI

Lee County hires firm to track elusive debtors

12/4/2007 5:47:03 AM

Daily Journal

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Daily Journal

TUPELO - Soon, not even an address change will thwart Lee County's effort to collect overdue fines.

County supervisors Monday approved a contract with a company that tracks people through a cross-reference program to find them even when they've moved several times.

The Accurint system, offered by LexisNexis, will help locate hundreds of Justice Court debtors who together owe more than \$1 million, said Sean Thompson, the county's data systems manager.

"If someone is in rental property and they leave," he said about today, "it's hard to keep track of them."

Thompson, who presented the contract to supervisors at their regular December meeting, said it will cost the county \$175 per month but that it likely will pay for itself in collected fines.

That has been the case in Lowndes County. Justice Court administrator Linder Eryv said she's collected more than \$25,500 in overdue fines since she started using Accurint on July 1.

"It's a lot of work, but it's rewarding," Eryv said. "I maybe do about 25-30 cases a time, and I usually get a good address. I had a guy come in just this past Friday and pay \$1,000."

According to the LexisNexis Web site, Accurint "allows you to find current addresses, unpublished telephone numbers, and even work or business locations; it also gives you access to critical information about property and assets."

If successful in Lee County, the program could expand to other departments besides Justice Court, said county administrator Ronnie Bell. Solid Waste, for example, is owed several hundreds of thousands of dollars in unpaid fees, he said.

The program will come with security measures to prevent tampering and personal use, Thompson said.

"And we won't use it on everybody," he added. "Just people who are 30 days or more past due."

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Appeared originally in the Northeast Mississippi Daily Journal, 12/4/2007, section A, page 1