

100 MOMENTS

SEX OFFENDER REGISTRY

By Cheryl Nolan (2003-current)

We are so very blessed to have a fantastic team! Bret Braafhart, Amy Kluender, Jack Liao, Jagat Sandhu, Beau Stangeland, Craig Triplett, Karin Hamilton, Tosha Brooks, Janese Milam, Cheryl Nolan, Brianne Potts, Nancy Throckmorton and our newest addition, Maria Candelario. This group does a wonderful job at helping each other, wanting to learn more, and keeping in mind the safety of Iowans and children.

Sex offender are required to register for 10-years or life-time, depending on the offense of conviction. In 2009 “Modification” of sex offender requirements became available through the courts, allowing a judge to remove someone from the Iowa registry or change the registrant’s requirements. There are “steps” required for this process including a risk assessment showing low risk to re-offend conducted by the Department of Corrections.

Our current public website www.iowasexoffender.gov displays all persons required to register EXCEPT the offender under the age of 20 and the victim was age 14 or 15 and the conviction was for subsection of Sexual Abuse 3rd degree (aka Romeo & Juliet).

The website allows the public to save a “watch” that can be on a specific offender, a radius from an address, a city, or a county. The choices for notification include, email, telephone call, or text message when there is a change to the record, the notification is sent as requested. A user is not limited to one ‘watch’. Advanced access is available to the criminal justice community to view our monthly newsletter, and records that do not appear on the public side of the website.

Sex offenders are required to appear in person at the local sheriff’s office to register “relevant information”. The frequency of their appearance is based on their legislatively set Tier classification (Tier I reports - 1 time per year, Tier II - 2 times per year and Tier III - 4 times per year) or within 5 business days of changes to relevant information. Registering offenders must provide items such as name, address, who is living there, telephone numbers, employment information, vehicles they own or have access to, and internet identifiers.

Sex offenders are not required to register while incarcerated. Sex offenders that go to prison for any offense, are removed from the public

website and placed in an “inactive” status. The sex offender remains required to register upon release. For each day incarcerated, another day is added to registration. Sex Offenders convicted of failure to comply are required to register an additional 10-years. Each record is reviewed prior to expiration to ensure the 10-year requirement has been met.

Working at the Sex Offender Registry Unit can be taxing. Personal experiences and beliefs about offenders, having empathy for offenders, victims, and their families can task our ideals and emotions. It is not impossible to have a day when we cry at our desk based upon what we have read, or heard, or seen. Each day the professionals in the Sex Offender Registry Unit aid victims, offenders, and the general public. It is common to assist an offender in being compliant (we want them to register) and insure they are removed from the Registry when the time is right, to answer questions from families and victims are difficult when you know the details behind the questions, and to work with law enforcement and prosecutors to assure compliance. Just when you think you have heard it all...a new case comes forward with acts we will never be able to fully understand.

Still, considering all of this, you may walk by the Sex Offender Registry area and hear laughter. We triumph over completion of monthly reports such as NCIC validations, 10-year reviews, verification reports, providing testimony in court, convictions in noncompliance cases and knowing we have done our very best to ensure compliance, protection, and accuracy.

Among all of this, we remain focused. Everything we do is an extension of the Division of Criminal Investigation. Our best efforts forward, learning from errors, pride in our ethics, and a strong commitment to be the very best we can be.

Over the years:

1995 – Iowa Sex Offender Registry signed into law, allowing the public to access sex offender information that was previously restricted to law enforcement. The law was inspired by the 1989 abduction and murder of Jacob Wetterling of Minnesota.

1998 – Offenders with more than one conviction requiring registration must register for life.

1999 – Established “aggravated offenses” one conviction of these require lifetime registration.

2002 – The 2000 foot law came into effect. This law was immediately appealed.

2003 – Dru Sjodin age 22 was sexually assaulted and murdered in North Dakota by a noncompliant sex offender from Minnesota. This incident initiated a National Sex Offender Public Website NSOPW. Iowa was the 2nd state to contribute records.

2004 – All offenders added to the public website, removing the Romeo & Juliet exemption. Prior to this only offenders listed as “high or moderate risk to reoffend” were posted.

2005 – Jessica Luncsford (9) of Florida, Jetseta Gage (10) of Cedar Rapids, Sarah Lunde (13) Florida, Evelyn Miller (5) of Charles City were

each sexually assaulted and murdered within a few weeks. Jessica & Jetseta by noncompliant sex offenders. Sarah by a sex offender who had dated her mother. Evelyn by her mother's boyfriend. These events brought about change in sentencing including "special sentence" which subjects an offender to an additional 10 years of DOC supervision or life parole. In September, the 2000 foot law was deemed constitutional and enforcement began.

2006 – The Adam Walsh Act was enacted.

2007 – Sex Offender Registry & DCI moved from the Wallace State Office Building to the Oran Pape State Office Building.

2008 – ISORD – Iowa Sex Offender Registry Database construction was well under way

2009 – Chapter 692A was replaced as the first steps toward Iowa becoming Adam Walsh Act compliant.

2013 – Code Editor replaced the number system for Chapter 692A & Chapter 709 & others.

2016 – Location of the body of 11 year old Jacob Wetterling was divulged by Danny Heinrich. Jacob had been missing for 27 years. He was sexually assaulted and murdered the same day he was abducted.

2020 – The Iowa Sex Offender Registry Database (ISORD) was replaced with the Iowa Sex Offender Registry Application (SORA).

CHERYL NOLAN – 2021

Cheryl joined the Sex Offender Registry Unit in 2003 and, today, she is one of the longest tenured and most experienced members of the Unit