

Video link helps INS identify and question possible violators

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Byline: CHRISTOPHER QUINN

Body

The Cherokee County jail is serving up a little TV justice to immigrants charged with crimes.

Jailers began using a video link to the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service office in Atlanta last month to help cull and deport those who are here and shouldn't be.

Agents from the INS review an electronic list of names of those arrested in Cherokee County each morning, said Maj. Tyrone Duke of the Cherokee County Sheriff's Office.
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If INS agents spot a name of someone they know should not be in the United States or see a deportable criminal charge against an immigrant, the agents can ask jailers to bring that person to a video interview room. The room in the Cherokee jail has been set up with \$60,000 worth of video cameras and monitors. The equipment was paid for with a Justice Department grant. INS agents can conduct interviews or hold hearings for the immigrants using the video link.

Sue Brown, spokeswoman for the INS, said it's a time-saver for INS agents, who have to travel all over the metro area.

"They love it," she said. "They use these units to interview the people, and after the interview they pretty much know whether we need to pick these people up or not."

"We do about 15 interviews a day," Brown said. "We put a hold on about a third of them."

A hold means the INS has found some reason to pick the person up and take him or her to Atlanta, possibly for deportation.

The INS has been expanding such video conference centers as the number of immigrants in metro Atlanta has grown rapidly.

The INS has also set up video links with Forsyth, Cobb and Gwinnett counties, Brown said.

Of the six video interviews held at the Cherokee County jail, four have resulted in hold orders, Duke said.

That will free up a few of the 150 beds in the crowded jail. Cherokee farms out several dozen prisoners on any given day to other jails in the area at the cost of about \$35 a day.

"If that's three or four beds freed up, that's three or four beds we don't have to pay \$35 a day on," Duke said. "So this will save us money in the long run."

Video link helps INS identify and question possible violators

The county is building a \$30 million, 320-bed jail that should bring all its prisoners back home by 2002.

Sheriff Roger Garrison said when the INS is not using the equipment, his department can use it for other purposes. He hopes to be able to install video links to Cherokee County Magistrate Court, so officers can use the video links to swear out warrants or hold hearings before a magistrate judge.

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