

## **CASCADE COUNTY KEEPING STREETS SAFER THROUGH VIDEO ARRAIGNMENT OF ACCUSED CRIMINALS**

*U S WEST Video Solutions Cuts Costs for Sheriff's Office, County Courts*

**GREAT FALLS, Mont., April XX, 1999**—When Judge Nancy Luth takes her bench in the Great Falls Municipal Court to arraign alleged criminals for misdemeanor crimes, she turns on her television.

As Judge Luth faces the accused, she does not look at the table and chairs below her bench. Instead, she looks into a camera and begins proceedings with an inmate three miles away in the Cascade County Jail.

Less than a year ago, Judge Luth began using a U S WEST-installed video conferencing system that allows her to conduct proceedings with alleged criminals without transporting them from the county's new jail. As the judge arraigns the accused, she uses a fax machine in conjunction with the video system to send formalized charges to the jail.

"Video arraignments make my job more efficient and I no longer run a safety risk by confronting a prisoner who may want to misbehave in my courtroom," said Judge Luth.

For the Cascade County Sheriff's Office, the benefits are just as great. Without video arraignments, the county would have spent nearly \$24,000 a year in deputy salaries to transport prisoners, according to Undersheriff Kent Funiyak. The savings translates into an additional 2,500 hours that officers can now spend on the streets. Additionally, the sheriff's office saves about \$1,280 a year in fuel and other transportation costs.

"With video arraignment, we can keep more officers on the streets," Funiyak said. "We don't have safety risks to the public by transporting alleged criminals from the jail to the courts and we are saving money that would have to be spent on fuel and maintenance for the transport vehicles."

Cascade County's video system includes high-speed fiber-optic and T1 lines, as well as U S WEST Frame Relay Service, a data transport technology by which data travels over network lines. The network allows fast information exchange and criminal checks between the courts, as well as with the Montana Department of Justice and the Great Falls City Police.

"The county needed a solution that would transform its current system into a network capable of reaching many resources quickly," said Connie Larson, U S WEST senior market manager, State & Local Government Services. "U S WEST responded with a customized solution designed to streamline the courts' law enforcement processes through the use of fiber-optic video."

Through its successful use in municipal court, Cascade County is exploring ways to expand the video network to other entities across the state. There are plans to hook into the state prison system, as well as the Law Enforcement Academy in Helena. That way,

Funyak said, officers could get valuable training via the network instead of spending budget on travel time and lodging.

**About U S WEST**

U S WEST (NYSE:USW) provides a full range of telecommunications services including wireline, wireless PCS, data networking, directory and information services to more than 25 million customers nationally and in 14 western and Midwestern states. More information about U S WEST can be found on the Internet at <http://www.uswest.com>.