

# Academy Forum

*Continuing the Message of the Roper Victim Assistance Academy*

**A Quarterly Newsletter**

**Issue #13 - January 2009**

**Just a Thought**

*One of the fastest growing crimes in America is identity theft - learn about some simple strategies you can share with others to help protect themselves from becoming a victim, and what resources are available for those who are victimized.*

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**Web Links**

*You never know what resources await you on the world-wide web ...come see what our latest surfing expedition uncovered.*

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**Best Practices**

*Learn more about the resources the Maryland Crime Victims' Resource Center has developed to assist victims of identity theft.*

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**President's Corner**

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**Alumni Updates**

*Always find yourself thinking "I wonder what happened to..."*



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**The 20/20**

*Each newsletter get an inside look at one of the RVAAM peers - 20 questions, 20 unique answers.*

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## Just a thought...

*Identity Theft - America's Fastest Growing Crime*

**Detective Ryan Hall, Harford County Sheriff's Office**

In what many public officials are calling the fastest growing crime in the United States, another individual falls victim to identity theft every 3.19 seconds. One of the reasons why these crimes have not garnered as much attention by the public as street crimes is that the offenders who commit these acts are working without the usual tools of the trade. Forget weapons, all it takes is a person's name and Social Security number to do the trick, or even one of those blank pre-approved credit applications people casually toss in the trash. Even talking on the phone, or surfing the Internet, provides these offenders the opportunity to rob you of the one thing you may have thought safe from attack - your identity.

**The Power of Personal Information**

Perpetrators of identity theft may use a variety of tactics to obtain your personal information and proceed to drain your finances. They may pose as a loan officer and order a copy of your credit report; they may look over your shoulder while you use the ATM or phone booth to get your PIN code; or they may even resort to 'dumpster diving' in the trash bins behind businesses or apartments looking for blank credit applications, canceled checks, bank records, or any other document that includes an individual's personal information. Some identity thieves even steal mail right out of individuals' mailboxes.



Unfortunately, it may take months before an individual discovers that he or she has become a victim of identity theft; often as the result of their being turned down for a credit loan of some sort because of their now bad credit rating. Even those individuals who have a wallet stolen and immediately call their bank and credit card companies to put a 'stop' on their accounts are still vulnerable. Once identity thieves have your personal informa-

tion, they can open new accounts or lines of credit under your name, for their own use.

**An Ounce of Prevention is Worth a Pound of Cure**

By just being a little more cognizant of how you manage your personal information, you can minimize your odds of becoming a victim of identity theft

- \* Each year, review your consumer credit reports. Every U.S. Citizen is eligible for a free credit report once a year. You can obtain your credit report at [www.annualcreditreport.com](http://www.annualcreditreport.com)
- \* Always shred any unwanted documents that contain personal information.
- \* Deposit mail in U.S. Postal Service collection boxes, or drop it off at the Post Office. Never leave mail in your mailbox overnight or on weekends. And always have the Post Office hold your mail while you are on vacation.
- \* Never leave transaction receipts at ATM machines, on counters at financial institutions, or at gas pumps. Take them home and shred them.
- \* Never carry you Social Security card or any other document that has your social security number on it with you - lock it up in a secure place.

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EDITOR'S CORNER

*Greetings Alumni!*

*I hope everyone has enjoyed a restful holiday, but knowing how hard you all work, I'm sure there wasn't much rest to be had. We're always good at taking care of others, but we certainly need to learn to take better care of ourselves. So this year let's all make it a point to do just that.*

*Every year seems to go by faster and faster and now is the time to start preparing for the next RVAAM class to attend the Academy June 1st-5th, 2009, in Sykesville. I hope everyone will start recruiting now so that we can ensure a diverse class. The RVAAM Executive Board is working very hard preparing for the upcoming Academy as well and would love input from all of you on what we could do to make the experience for the participants even better. We also need lots of volunteers, so mark these dates on your calendar and plan to attend.*

*Wishing you all the best!*

Debbie (Creswell) Bradley, Editor

[bradleyd@harfordsheriff.org](mailto:bradleyd@harfordsheriff.org)

Web Links

*Although we have a virtual library at our fingertips every time we turn on the computer, we often lose sight of the forest through the trees just trying to navigate the world-wide web. Here are a few sites that relate to this issue's "Just a Thought" ... happy surfing!*

**Federal Trade Commission - Identify Theft Site** - Visitors to this site can learn how to avoid identify theft, and what steps to take if their identity is stolen. Businesses can learn how to help their customers prevent this form of victimization from occurring; and law enforcement can peruse through resources on tracking identify theft and assisting victims of this crime. The site address is <http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/edu/microsites/idtheft/>

**Identity Theft Resource Center** - This site provides a breadth of information and resources to help educate people about identity theft and provide resources to help prevent this type of crime from occurring. ITFC provides victim and consumer support, as well as advises governmental agencies and law enforcement about



the evolving and growing problem of identity theft. Take some time and explore the site at - <http://www.idtheftcenter.org/index.html>

Just a thought...

(continued from page 1)

- \* Make a copy of all items you carry in your wallet or purse, including credit cards, insurance cards, etc. and store that in a safe location. In the event your wallet or purse is stolen or misplaced, you have easy access to all the information you will need to have the cards cancelled and to report the theft of all important items.
- \* Never disclose credit card or other personal information on a web site unless the site offers a secure transaction. Look for the little lock icon usually located in the upper right-hand corner.
- \* Beware when putting information on public websites, such as MySpace or Facebook; over time, a thief can compile your personal information one small and seemingly insignificant item at a time.
- \* Beware of mail or telephone solicitations that offer prizes or awards - especially if the company asks you for personal account numbers.
- \* Check your monthly financial statements for accuracy.

In the event you, or someone you know, falls victim of identity theft, complete the following so you can be sure that the incident is documented properly:

- \* Contact your local police department (or the police department where any part of the crime occurred) and request a police report. Maryland Law 8-304(b) requires that a police report be written if an ID theft complaint is

filed. Ask that the FTC complaint be attached to the police report.

- \* Close all compromised accounts immediately, and call every company where an account has been tampered with or opened fraudulently.
- \* Report any fraudulent credit card activity to all three major credit reporting bureaus: Equifax (800) 525-6285, Experian (888) 397-3742, and TransUnion (800) 680-7289. The best way to fix your credit report is to file a Universal Complaint Form and a police report together; these constitute an ID Theft Report and require the three credit reporting bureaus to block negative information on your credit report within 4 days. A copy of the Universal Complaint Form can be downloaded at the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) website at [www.consumer.gov/idtheft](http://www.consumer.gov/idtheft)

- \* Contact the Maryland Crime Victims' Resource Center at (877) 842-8461, so you get free assistance in resolving the matter.
- \* Be sure to keep a record of every person you talk to, and when you talked to them, and how to get back in touch with them if you need to in the future.



Sadly, 9.9 million Americans reported being a victim of identity theft in 2007. Although there is no way to guarantee you will not become a victim of this type of crime, by being more vigilant in protecting your personal information, you can significantly minimize your odds and avoid becoming another statistic.

## Best Practices

Sometimes it's hard to take what we've learned and apply it out in the field. In this section, we highlight a best practice other agencies have implemented to better serve victims of crime.

### MCVRC Assisting Victims of Identity Theft and Fraud

**Krista Burich, Victim Support Liaison**

Over the past decade, identity theft and fraud have become an increasing problem throughout the United States, and the problem is becoming more complex, challenging, and costly each year. Due to the large numbers of individuals affected by identity theft and fraud, the Maryland Crime Victims' Resource Center [MCVRC], with the support of the Office for Victims of Crime, is working in conjunction with other national and local agencies to serve and assist victims nationwide.

The funding awarded to MCVRC is being used to enhance its ability to provide free assistance to victims of identity theft and financial fraud by assisting victims with creditors, financial institutions, and law enforcement. As well as providing referrals, MCVRC offers free direct legal representation to victims in Maryland and federal court, protecting their rights in criminal cases. Additionally, MCVRC offers court accompaniment, free counseling, and victims' pro se packets.

MCVRC is also offering training and education to judges, lawyers, and advocates, as well as providing pro bono attorney and law enforcement development across the nation. The MCVRC is also partnering with the Georgia Legal Service Office, Maryland Pro Bono Resource Center, the ABA Center for Pro Bono, and other agencies to assist with pro bono attorney development as well as to create internet pro bono packets and a pro bono training module that can be replicated nationwide. The MCVRC is also partnering with the Maryland Police and Correctional Training Commission, the International Association of Directors of Law Enforcement Standards and Training, and the International Association of Chiefs of Police to create, test, and nationally replicate a model training program for criminal justice agencies that will teach individuals how to appropriately document, serve, and refer target victims.

If your group or organization would like to schedule a presentation on identity theft, and how you can use the resources offered by MCVRC to better serve your victims, please

call Krista Burich at (301) 952-0063 or toll free at 1 (877) VICTIM1; or look us up on the web at [www.mdcrimevictims.org](http://www.mdcrimevictims.org) or send us an email at [fraud@mdcrimevictims.org](mailto:fraud@mdcrimevictims.org)



## Alumni Updates

*It seems like only yesterday when we were all together at the Academy. But in a blink of an eye another year has almost passed us by. Here's just a snapshot of some of the special events and milestones our alums have experienced since we last met...*

**Cori Brooks (2007)** - Cori recently graduated from the University of Baltimore with a Masters in Science in Criminal Justice. Shortly afterwards, she moved out to San Francisco to try her hand at living on the west coast. Congratulations Cori on your achieving your goals - we wish you all the best and will miss you!

**Angela Fizer (2008)** - Angela recently obtained a new job as the Community Family Advocate for Sinai Hospital's Family Violence Program. Congratulations Angela, we know you will bring a wonderful breadth of knowledge and experience to your new position!

**Maria Garcia (2008)** - Maria recently graduated from the University of Baltimore with a Masters in Science in Criminal Justice. Congratulations Maria on achieving your goals!

**Jennifer Goode (2005)** - Jennifer's son, Andrew, just celebrated his first birthday on September 7th. We hope you have enjoyed your first year of motherhood Jen!

**Kim Holmes (2006)** - Kim recently welcomed a new grief counselor, Tanya Bryant, at the Baltimore City Family Bereavement Center. Congratulations Kim on adding more support services for your clients!

**George Lee (2008)** - George received a 2008 Advocacy Award from the Maryland Network against Domestic Violence (MNADV) for "his dedication as a full-time volunteer domestic

violence advocate at the Life Crisis Center on the Lower Eastern Shore." High five George!

**Tina Shankle (2005)** - Tina celebrated a birthday right before the holidays, on December 16th. Happy belated birthday Tina, we hope you did something fun to mark the occasion!

## The President's Corner

I would like to wish everyone a very happy New Year and send each of you my best wishes for 2009. I know times are difficult and almost all of us are overloaded at work, so it is a constant challenge to find a moment to take care of ourselves and our families. So, I appreciate you taking a moment out of your busy schedule to read the Alumni newsletter to catch up with all of the developments that are taking place with the Alumni Association.

It's hard to believe, but this year's Academy is just barely four months away! The application for this year's Academy is posted on the Academy's website (<http://www.rvaam.org>), so please go online and download a copy to share with your colleagues. As you might remember from last year, we had an overly large class and had to turn applicants away because of limited space. So please encourage your colleagues to apply early to secure a spot for themselves.

The Alumni Association has many exciting projects in the works this year. Our main goal is to reconnect and to regenerate the Alumni Association. To assist in this mission, I am pleased to announce the creation of three new Committees - The Resource Committee, The Mentoring Committee, and the Fundraising Committee.

a) **The Resource Committee**, headed by Diana Ambramowski, will be searching for resources in the individual counties across Maryland. Eventually we hope to make this resource list available online on our webpage. Diana may contact you for assistance with the Committee or just to help gather information on the resources that are available in your area. Either way, please help her develop this resource guide.

b) **The Mentoring Committee**, headed by Kia Hackney, will be working on drafting 'best practices' for our own mentoring program and ensuring that once the program is established, that Mentors and Alumni connect. If you are interested in working on this committee with Kia, please email her at [raeshel@hotmail.com](mailto:raeshel@hotmail.com). By supporting one

another and sharing what we have learned with our fellow colleagues, we help raise the level of service we are able to provide.

- c) **The Fundraising Committee**, headed by Dave Johnson, is currently looking into obtaining a 501c3 Non-Profit Status for the Alumni Association. By achieving such a status, the Alumni Association could accept donations and hold fundraisers. With the state of the economy and funding cut-backs, this committee would assist in providing additional Advanced Training opportunities for the Alumni and provide scholarship opportunities for future participants to the Academy.

Along with these three new committees, the Executive Board members are busy coordinating the different projects overseen by the Operations Committee, the Marketing Committee, and Outreach Committee. Here is a brief summary of what each of these committees are working on right now:

- a) **The Operations Committee**, co-chaired by Brian Murray and Debra Snow, will be planning the 'after hours' events for this year's Academy, such as 'Game Night' or the 'Welcome Ice Cream Social.' Additionally, they will be in charge of developing roles for Alumni who wish to assist at the 2009 Academy. This committee has a large responsibility in helping the Academy run smoothly and to be an enjoyable experience for the participants. Please consider assisting in any way you can in their endeavors. The Operation Committee will also be looking for suggestions for both social and training events, so if you have any ideas, please do not hesitate to share them with either Brian or Debra!
- b) **The Marketing Committee**, chaired by Linda Fair, is currently working on updating the brochure for the 2009 Academy. Additionally, the committee has been tasked with creating a survey to help identify ways to reconnect alumni with the Alumni Association. As such, we will be contacting each of you via email, telephone, and regular U.S. mail. Our goal is to contact each member and verify whether they are still working in the field of victim services and if they are still interested in staying in contact with our organization
- c) **The Outreach Committee**, chaired by Debbie Bradley, is responsible for updating the Alumni Directory and putting together the quarterly newsletter. In our recent Executive Board meeting, we discussed new ways to keep Alumni updated and to keep the information in the Directory current; one idea we are considering is to add a link to the RVAAM website where individuals can

send an email directly to Debbie to inform her of any changes to their contact information. If you have any other ideas on how we can better stay in touch with all of our Alumni, please feel free to share your thoughts with me! All in all, we are striving to find better ways to share information with Alumni, to provide everyone an opportunity to be involved in the Alumni Association, and to make sure no one is left out of the loop.

The Executive Board has great plans for the coming year, and we need your help and your participation. If you haven't done so already, be sure to mark on your calendar that the next General Membership meeting will be held on Thursday, February 12th at the Rite-Aid Customer Support Center (601 Chelsea Road, Perryman MD) from 10:00am - 12:00pm. At the meeting, each of the Committee Chairs will present a summary of the projects they are working on and have a sign-up sheet prepared for the various tasks they need assistance with. Even if you do not feel you can commit to serving on a committee, it would be wonderful if you would provide any assistance you can in helping them achieve their goals. Another important item we will be taking care of at the General Membership meeting is electing new members to the Executive Board. We are still accepting nominations, so if you are interested, please contact Alicia Johnson-Davis ([johnson2davis@yahoo.com](mailto:johnson2davis@yahoo.com)) right away so your name can be added to the ballot. We will also be voting for two officer positions that are up for re-election: Vice President and Treasurer. Both of these positions must be filled by an active Board Member, who has attended at least three Executive Board meetings in the past year.

Following the General Membership meeting, we hope you will stay and have lunch with us and then participate in the free Advanced Training on "Active Listening" that will be led by Dave Betz. An evite was sent to all Alumni earlier this month with all of the information on the training. If you did not receive this evite, and are interested in attending, please contact Alicia Johnson-Davis ([johnson2davis@yahoo.com](mailto:johnson2davis@yahoo.com)) so she can reserve you a seat. Space is limited, so don't delay!

I hope to see each of you at the General Meeting and I look forward to working for you, and with you, in further building our Alumni Association.

**Valda Rotolo; Alumni President**



Save  
the  
Date

**RVAAM Alumni Association General Membership Meeting and Advanced Training on "Active Listening"**

Thursday, February 12th, 2009; Rite Aid Mid-Atlantic Customer Support Center, 601 Chelsea Road, Perryman, MD 21130, (410) 297-6078.

The general membership meeting will be held from 10:00am - 12:00pm, and will be followed by lunch from 12:00 - 1:00pm. The Advanced Training, led by Dave Betz, will then be held from 1:00 - 4:00pm.

Space for the advanced training is limited, so please RSVP as soon as possible to Alicia Johnson-Davis at [johnson2davis@yahoo.com](mailto:johnson2davis@yahoo.com)

**9th Annual Victims' Fund Run - Sponsored by the Baltimore City State's Attorneys Office**

Saturday, April 18th, Patterson Park. For more information, please call (410) 396-1897.

**2009 National Crime Victims' Rights Week**

April 26 - May 2, 2009. A few of the scheduled events: OVC's National Observance and Candlelight Ceremony - April 23; Attorney General's Crime Victims' Service Awards Ceremony - April 24.

**2009 Roper Victim Assistance Academy of Maryland**

June 1 - 5, 2009, Maryland Public Safety and Correctional Training Center, Sykesville, MD.

# The 20 / 20

*Each newsletter we pose twenty questions to one of our members to get an inside look at who they are ... this month get to know Debbie Bradley, a graduate of the 2005 Academy*

**My motto or favorite saying is ...** "Every Saint has a past, every sinner has a future"

**My favorite retreat is ...** the beach

**The last book I read was ...** "The Purpose of Christmas" by Rick Warren

**My favorite indulgence is ...** getting a pedicure

**My childhood ambition was ...** to be a teacher

**The perfect day to me would be ...** Sitting on the beach in Maui with my husband, reading a book

**The three words that best describe my life are ...** Passionate, organized, and caring

**My favorite food is ...** Steamed crabs!

**The occupation, other than the one I am currently in, I would want is ...**

A wedding planner

**The occupation I would certainly not like to have is ...** A painter

**My favorite sound is ...** Babies laughing

**My inspiration is ...** God.

**The biggest challenge for me is ...** Patience

**The best piece of advice I ever got was ...** Everyone has a story, don't be judgmental

**My fondest memory is...** Raising my daughter

**If I had to choose an animal that symbolizes my personality, it would be a ...** Badger - tenacious, independent, assertive, loyal, and dependable ... but don't back me into a corner!

**My proudest moment ...** Being the only one in my family to earn a college degree

**What I love about my job...** Being able to help people during the worst times of their lives

**What I hate about my job is ...** Being the bearer of bad news.

**One of my goals for 2008 is...** to follow the path God has laid for me and not to try to control my own destiny.

## 2009 RVAAM Date Announced!

We are pleased to announce that the 6th Annual Roper Victim Assistance Academy will be held June 1-5, 2009, at the Maryland Public Safety Training and Education Center in Sykesville, MD. We hope you will help spread the word and recruit members for the upcoming class. Applications are now available!

## Alumni Directory

The 2008 Alumni Directory, which includes the addition of the most recent Academy class members, has just been completed and available for distribution. However, we still would like your help to keep the Alumni Directory up to date! If any of your personal and/or professional information changes, please contact Debbie Bradley via email at [bradleyd@harfordsheriff.org](mailto:bradleyd@harfordsheriff.org) or by phone at (410) 836-5490. We will then publish those changes in the following newsletter.

## Editorial Board

**Debbie (Creswell) Bradley — Editor**  
**Heather Courtney — Assistant Editor**  
**Alicia Johnson-Davis - Assistant Editor**  
**Diana Abramowski - Assistant Editor**  
**Heather Pfeifer — Managing Editor**

**Watch for the next edition of the Academy Forum in April 2009**