

Officials go on 'deadbeat' search twice a year

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FAIRFIELD COUNTY - Every week, Det. Paul Robberts of the Fairfield County Sheriff's Office attempts to track down at least one person who has allegedly dodged paying child support.

But on two designated days each year, Robberts' search becomes more intensive.

He participates in what some call the "deadbeat parents round-up." Once or twice a year, Robberts, along with Sheriff's Deputy John Baumgardt, will devote an entire day to tracking down parents who are far behind on child support payments.

Fairfield County had two round-ups in 2007, one in November and one in December. Three people were arrested in the two round-ups.

"In the past, we've picked up as many as 24 people in one round-up," Robberts said. "But even if we just catch one person, it's worth it."

In 2007, Ohio ended its yearly statewide round-up of nonpaying obligors.

Brian Harter, public information officer for Ohio Job and Family Services, said the decision centered mainly on concerns that the parents were being portrayed as "deadbeats."

"The state felt that some of the people being caught were parents who were really trying to make an effort to pay," Harter said. "In the past, the round-ups encouraged media involvement, which made for great theater when these parents were arrested. And it was just decided that not all these parents deserved to be humiliated on public television."

But Child Support Enforcement Agency Director Corey Clark said he feels the round-up is an effective way of catching those who fail to pay.

"It lets custodial parents know that we are working to find the people that aren't paying child support," Clark said. "And it lets the noncustodial parents know that, hey, we aren't going to take the matter of people not paying lightly."

There are currently eight people with felony warrants in Fairfield County for failure to pay child support. Felony warrants are issued at the discretion of the prosecutor's office on noncustodial parents who owe a significant amount of money.

"The people we are looking to catch are people who have been extremely delinquent, people who are hiding from the law and have made no attempts to work out their concerns regarding payment," said Mike Orlando, director of Fairfield County Job & Family Services.

Robberts said his first attempts to locate people by talking with family members, friends, past employers, landlords and the custodial parent for information on where the person may be.

In the meantime, the CSEA will use a search system called Ohio Parent Locator or post office verifications to obtain further information on the person's location, Clark said

The process, Clark said, can take a few months to a few years.

"If the person has a driver's license or a job, they can usually be tracked down fairly quickly," Clark said. "If the person works for cash or doesn't own a car or have a bank account, it can usually take several months for that person to be tracked down. There are quite a lot of cases where this takes place."

Robberts said oftentimes family or friends will also hide the person in their home or the person will move from location to location.

"So many of these people have four or five addresses," Robberts said. "If they don't want to be found, they won't be found."

November of 2007 was the last time a person was arrested on a felony warrant in Fairfield County. Raymond Romine owed \$39,877.52 when he was arrested in Decatur, Ala., Clark said.

He was sentenced to 138 days incarceration on Nov. 26, 2007, by Judge Steven Williams.

And although Robberts is intent upon catching the people who make up his felony list, he said conducting more than two round-ups a year isn't likely to happen.

"The round-ups are pretty intensive and focused," Robberts said. "I instead will try to work warrants once a week to try to catch the other people that are hiding too."