Little known fund assists crime victims

By Jonas Breaux
Staff Writer

NEW IBERIA — Victims of crime are often left holding the bag when it comes to paying for medical and other expenses resulting from their being preyed upon by criminals.

However, victims of crime in Iberia Parish have received monetary aid via the Crime Victim’s Reparations Program, which the state initiated in 1982.

Over the past 10 years more than $100,000 in restitution has been paid to Iberia Parish victims of crime, said Capt. Michael Dauphine of the Iberia Parish Sheriff's Office.

Victims eligible to apply for awards include crimes involving the use of force or threat of force which resulted in personal injury and/or loss of income, Dauphine said.

In addition, anyone may apply if they are:
- dependents of homicide victims;
- victim of DWI driver;
- victim of a driver who is fleeing apprehension by police;
- victim whose injuries were intentionally inflicted by a motor vehicle, boat or aircraft;
- surviving family member or one in close relationship to a victim, if such member or person was physically present and directly observed the commission of a homicide.

"There are a lot of victims of crime out there who aren't aware that the Crime Victim's Reparations Program exist," Dauphine said. "Many of the awards we've received in the parish have resulted from our department contacting the victims and telling them about the program."

Dauphine said the following conditions must be in place for a victim to be eligible for awards:
- the crime must have been committed in Louisiana after July 16, 1982. (A Bayou State resident who is a victim of crime in another state which does not have a crime victims compensation program may file a claim with the La. Crime Victims Board);
- the crime must have been reported to authorities within 72 hours, unless there is a valid reason for a later reporting;
- the victim must cooperate with any reasonable request authorities might make in their investigation and prosecution of the crime;
- a claim may be filed regardless of whether the offender is known or whether the offender has been arrested and/or found guilty;
- to file a claim, losses must not have been reimbursed from other sources (health insurance, workmen’s compensation, social security, etc.), and
- the claim must be filed within one year from the date of the crime.

Dauphine said a percentage of every traffic ticket and court cost levied in the state goes to fund CVRP awards.

"Every crime report written by our department comes across my desk," Dauphine said. "When I see a crime victim that fits the victims reparations criteria, I personally contact them to let them know they can apply for these funds."

"I have seven applications going before the board on Wednesday," he said. "And I've already been told that six will be granted awards."

Dauphine said computer records have been a tremendous aid in getting victims reparations they may not have received otherwise.

Computers have even assisted Dauphine in getting restitution from criminals who have served their time and are back on the streets.

In one instance, Dauphine had a restitution charge of $960 added to a parolee's condition of parole.

"There are a lot of victims who have no way to pay for medical or counseling services," Dauphine said. "In the case where the $960 parole stipulation was levied, the funds were used to pay for counseling sessions for a juvenile who was a victim of molestation."

Since the program began, three Iberia Parish residents have received the maximum CVRP award of $10,000. The maximum awards were for victims of an attempted murder and robbery, aggravated battery and arson.