

## Highlights

# National Computer Forensics Institute: Taking a Byte Out of Crime

BY BARRY PAGE, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, NATIONAL COMPUTER FORENSICS INSTITUTE

**“THE BAD GUYS HAVE COMPUTERS** and Internet access just like everybody else, and they use them to commit crimes. We should, and will, use that to catch and prosecute them,” says Barry Page, deputy director of the National Computer Forensics Institute (NCFI). Page, 43, a prosecutor in Alabama for 13 years, has worked at the NCFI since its inception two years ago. The NCFI opened in Hoover, Alabama, in May 2008 to train state and local law enforcement, prosecutors and judges in computer forensics. Since that time, over 600 have been trained covering 49 states, plus Guam and Puerto Rico. Of those trained, 120 are prosecutors.

The institute is the brainchild of Randy Hillman, executive director of the Alabama District Attorneys’ Association, and current president of the National Association of Prosecutor Coordinators. Six years ago, Hillman was working with the U.S. Secret Service to open four computer forensic labs in Alabama. “We started looking at the big picture with computer forensics and digital evidence and we knew that we had to train more than the folks working in our labs,” says Hillman. “We started looking out there and there was nobody else in the country that made it their daily business to train local law enforcement, judges or prosecutors. We said, ‘Why don’t we do it?’” At the March 2007 announcement ceremony for the NCFI, then-Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff said that the institute would help law enforcement catch up with criminal groups, which have become sophisticated users of computer technology. As NCFI participants return to their jurisdictions all over America that is happening. Hillman points out, “We are hearing on a regular basis that a real difference is being made in our nation’s law enforcement.”

A 32,000 square foot state of the art training facility was built in Hoover by the State of Alabama, and is operated by the U.S. Secret Service in partnership with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and the Alabama District Attorneys’ Association. The award winning designed facility includes five large computer training class-

rooms, a “smart” courtroom and a computer forensics lab. Training is based on the current U.S. Secret Service curriculum (which includes basic electronic crimes investigation, network intrusion investigation and computer forensics) and is taught by world class instructors and Secret Service agents. One to five week trainings are provided at absolutely no cost to the trainees or their agencies (including transportation and hotel). In addition, investigators are provided with the equipment, hardware and software to carry out their newly acquired skills in their jurisdictions. The NCFI is providing much needed training to participants from parts of the country where it has not been accessible or affordable. Many agencies have had to either drop cases or rely on the assistance of overburdened state or federal investigators.

Prosecutors who attend for five days learn about computer hardware and operating systems (including taking apart and reassembling a computer), as well as how the forensic process works and how to interpret reports. After learning what it is like to conduct a forensic investigation, prosecutors then discuss digital evidence law and courtroom strategy. Page says he knows firsthand what it is like to cringe when a computer investigator walks in your office with a case. “I knew enough to know that it was good science, but evaluating a case and explaining it to a jury was a different story.” Remembering that feeling provides motivation in his current job. “It is gratifying to see prosecutors learn that hitting ‘delete’ on a computer does not necessarily mean that something cannot be retrieved, but not nearly as gratifying as it is for those guys when they return home and share that information with a defendant and defense attorney.”

The NCFI has the capacity to train over 1200 people per year. As the proliferation of computers and digital devices continues to increase, the need for training law enforcement, prosecutors and judges becomes more important and



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necessary. A recent participant, Keith Burt, a deputy district attorney in San Diego says, “this (computer digital evidence) is the way of the future in crime. Anybody that sticks a gun in somebody’s face and forcibly takes money is a fool. Many criminals, even gang members, are recognizing this and are all going to more sophisticated ways to acquire money.”

The objective of the NCFI is to not only meet a critical demand, but assist in positioning law enforcement one step ahead of the criminal.

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### **Message from the Executive Director**

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we hope to do a demonstration at the meeting in Charleston in the spring. I am confident that NDAA members are going to be very pleased with the tremendous improvements to our Web site and our overall IT structure and systems.

I could go on and on, but suffice to say that we remain in “high gear” with a focus on:

- maintaining and increasing our grant funding and being fiscally responsible,
- being at the table—wherever the table is—on every public policy issue relating to the criminal justice system, and
- providing top-notch technical assistance and training to our prosecutors across the country.

On a personal note, and as represented when I was honored to be selected as your executive director, during my

The 2010 schedule of prosecutor training is as follows:

- March 22-26 (application deadline December 11)
- May 3-7 (application deadline January 22)
- July 26-30 (application deadline April 16)
- August 23-27 (application deadline May 14)

For more information on the NCFI and how to attend training, go to their Web site at [www.ncfi.ussc.gov](http://www.ncfi.ussc.gov), or contact Barry Page at [barry.page@alabamada.gov](mailto:barry.page@alabamada.gov).

years at the White House I also served in the capacity of sports minister of the United States. (We are one of only a few countries that do not have a minister of sports but are represented by a White House appointee). A year ago the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) selected me to head the International Independent Observer Program—to make certain that athletes compete drug-free—at the Winter Olympics in Vancouver, Canada, from February 10-28, 2010. I will, of course, be available by e-mail and cell phone and will continue to work on all issues related to NDAA, but I will not be in Alexandria or Columbia. As always, if you have questions about any issues regarding your NDAA, please don’t hesitate to call me (703.919.9286) or e-mail me ([sburns@ndaa.org](mailto:sburns@ndaa.org)) at anytime.

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### **Message from the President**

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These are only some of the issues NDAA, as the voice of America’s prosecutors, is working on. Many people work tirelessly every day to be that voice for each of you—not only your executive director but also our two legislative personnel, Jason Baker and Ryan Welch. Ryan is our independent contractor who is doing great work for not much pay. We need to find the money to keep him working.

We are holding our Capital Conference in Washington February 8-10, 2010. If we can receive a letter supporting the NAC from each state by then and combine that with a strong showing of attendance, that will really make a bold statement. At the Capital Conference, we will of course be focusing on many of the other important issues in addition to the NAC funding. Specifically, we will also use our time

on the Hill and at our reception to stress the importance of proper funding for the JRJ Act and student loan forgiveness, as well as for necessary updates on the NAS or other issues as appropriate.

Where do we go from here? We have made great strides in the past year or so. We have a new executive director who is well-respected, energetic, hard working and doing a great job. The John R. Justice Act is now law and we are about to get funding in some amount. We are again able to pay the expenses for students attending NAC courses, at least for nearly the next year. We are committed to going forward. Going forward by securing permanent funding for the NAC. Going forward by obtaining appropriate funding for student loan forgiveness. With the help and commitment of all of you we can accomplish these goals and many more.