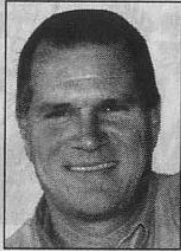


# Protect your valuable possessions from danger



John Deans

A few weeks ago, Washington County Deputy Damon Wegner and I made a trek to Wichita Falls for our Crime Stopper training.

Since he drove we got there in 4.5 hours and didn't make a single stop. He told me that was the police way of driving.

During our trip we were talking about property thefts around the county and how it would be so much easier if everyone had a good inventory and actually marked their household items. This made me squirm in my seat since I was guilty of not having an accurate list of our family's personal property.

Deputy Wegner explained that it's very difficult for law enforcement to return or even identify stolen property if the legitimate owner never wrote down the serial numbers or engraved their Texas driver's license (TDL) directly on those items.

Stolen TVs, lawn mowers and even guns can all look alike if the rightful owners cannot accurately identify them.

So my new project was to perform a complete estate inventory and engrave all of our significant household and ranch items. Though we have never had any theft problems in our area, we are not immune either. Plus, you always

want to make it as difficult as possible for the bums so they will go on down the road to an easier target.

My first chore was to figure out how I was going to document the inventory. I knew for sure I wanted to take digital pictures of all our stuff that could be lost from theft, fire or storm, but what format was I going to

put the pictures and text into?

My first thought was a simple Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, but after some Web surfing I found a cool program called Collectify Home Inventory from [www.Collectify.com](http://www.Collectify.com). This nifty little \$49 program makes it simple and easy to compile a comprehensive digital inventory of your home possessions.

Before making the software purchase I watched the tutorial online and was able to get a good idea on how it worked and how simple it was to use. The basic flow of the software is a room by room tour of your home taking pictures along the way and filling in the description data fields with the make, model and serial numbers as you go along.

The tutorial sold me on the software so I purchased it online and began the 15 MB download which took barely a minute over my 2Mb/s wireless link from Texas Broadband. Just after the

download completed the license key was e-mailed to me and after inputting the information into the application's registration tool I was off and going!

I set up two databases with one for our home and another for Deans Consulting, both with passwords on them just in case the databases themselves become compromised. Since most our stuff is related to the home I started with that one.

The software is laid out in the fashion enabling you to name a room and even put an overall picture of that room as the icon for the room's folder. Then within that folder you start adding all the items like furniture, electronics, tools, jewelry or even firearms.

The Collectify Home Inventory software even lets you put audio and video of the rooms and their objects in its database. I kept it simple and skipped the videoing of our stuff and just took pictures with our digital camera so I would not have to rewind and forward to get to each item during the description entry step.

To get started I just walked around our main room and started snapping pictures of each item. After the photo tour was done I downloaded the digital images onto my laptop with the Collectify Home Inventory software installed, imported the one or more photos representing each item and then begin typing in each of the descriptions.

For the hard-to-reach areas I had my 9-year old daughter crawl behind our entertainment center and call out the model and serial numbers to the AV (audio/video) components. Kids can be handy at times.

As I entered the item data and assigned both a purchased cost and a current value for replacement and insurance reports, the room and home contents value rose.

By the end of the day I had photographed and inventoried our whole household so the following day I went outside and kept on going. I made a new 'room' in the database for the garage and documented all my tools, lawn care items, bicycles, and ATVs.

That continued out in the field with me entering the data and images for my tractor and all the associated implements.

By the end of the weekend I finished the second database of Deans Consulting with all my computer hardware and software scattered around numerous rooms and vehicles. After finally completing the Collectify project the software tallies the item count and values for each room.

For safe keeping I printed out the inventory reports that included all the photos and text descriptions in a PDF format. I then stored the hardcopies in a secure area and also made sure the databases were backed up remotely

via [www.DataDepositBox.com](http://www.DataDepositBox.com) and [www.Mozy.com](http://www.Mozy.com).

This comprehensive inventory will be a blessing and a critical necessity if we are ever burglarized or a fire breaks out — God forbid.

Even if a tornado strikes and wipes our place off the map while we're in our underground storm shelter I had installed nine years ago, we could drive to the library, get on the Internet, download our Collectify inventory database and print out a complete list of everything lost to the storm within an hour.

The next weekend I implemented the second phase of Deputy Wegner's strong recommendation and purchased a \$25 electric engraver and put my TDL as "TX-57337\*\*" on every item that can be carried or hauled off by thieves.

This only took an hour and now I can rest assured that I have continued my efforts to stay vigilant against those who prowl against us.

Bottom line: With less than \$100 you too can inventory and mark your treasures to keep them organized and safe from the dangers of this world.

Next week's column: Free online TV?

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