

Credit card machine bypasses bondsmen

1 SAN JOSE, Calif. — Who needs a bail bondsman to get out of jail?

Starting this week, Santa Clara County will offer some suspects an interactive kiosk where they can use a credit card to get out of the slammer within minutes of being booked.

It's like an automatic teller machine, but instead of dispensing cash it grants instant access out of jail.

The heaviest use is expected from those arrested for relatively minor crimes with bails under \$5,000 — well within the limit many people carry on their credit cards. Crimes will include vandalism, assault, drunken driving and drug possession.

Defendants get the basic bail amount back from the county once the case is resolved — as long as they show up in court. If they use a bail bond agent or the kiosk, they pay a \$500, nonrefundable fee.

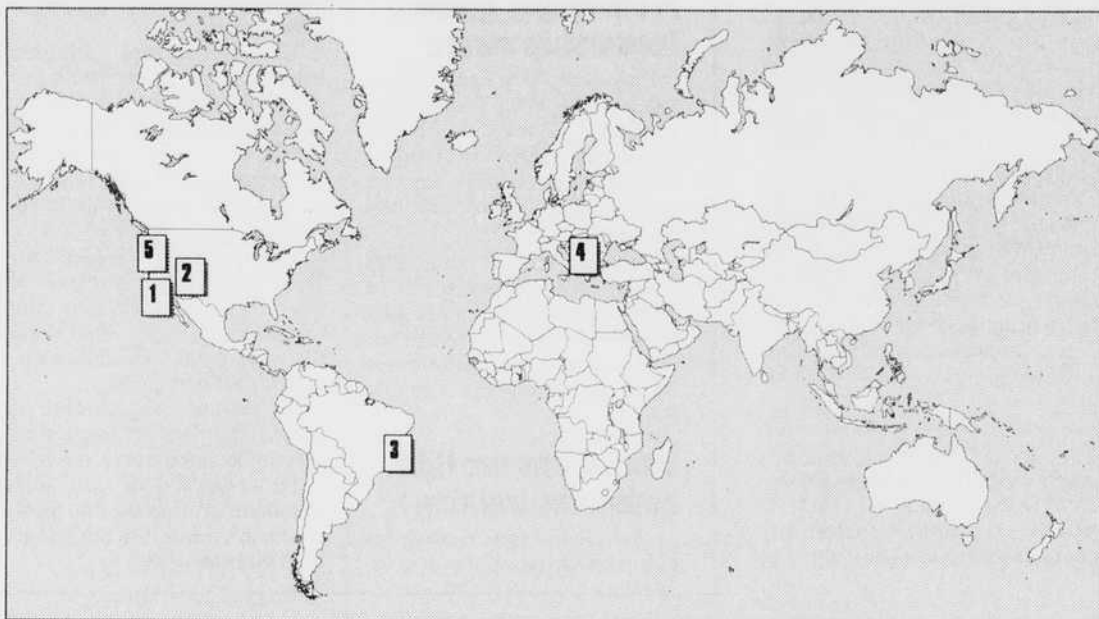
County officials said the bail kiosks will reduce taxpayer costs and jail overcrowding.

Bail bondsmen hate the idea, claiming the service is illegal because it's not state-licensed, like they must be. They also complain that it's unfair competition.

"The first time I heard about this was last week, and I was flabbergasted," said Ted Wallace, president of the Santa Clara County Professional Bail Association. "We're definitely investigating our legal options."

Judicial Solutions, the company that operates the kiosk, said it doesn't need a license because it doesn't put up money for defendants, just enables them to tap into their own credit lines.

"It's a fairly political product because the bail industry has had it to themselves for 240 years," said John Bergmann, president of Judicial Solutions. "But we're definitely not bailing out O.J. Simpson; we're taking the crumbs."



Mother pleads to son: Get help for your child

2 SALT LAKE CITY — The mother of a man who allegedly kidnapped his malnourished child from a hospital appealed Sunday for him and his wife to surrender before their dangerous ideas about nutrition kill the 20-month-old boy.

Cheryl Gardner worried for the safety of the little boy as temperatures dipped below freezing and snow started to fall in Utah's mountains, where Christopher and Kyndra Fink are believed to have taken their boy last month.

"It's too cold to have that baby out there. He's so hungry," Gardner said at a press conference organized by the FBI.

A security camera showed Fink taking the boy, David, from Primary Children's Medical Center on Sept. 19, five days after Kyndra Fink's family admitted the severely malnourished child.

He weighed 16 pounds, which is about the size of an average 6-month-old, and had been fed only watermelon and lettuce according to a diet his father believed would allow the boy to live forever.

The last confirmed sighting of the family was about 50 miles southeast of Salt Lake on Sept. 25.

Cardoso wins in Brazil election, polls show

3 RIO DE JANEIRO, Brazil — Facing an uncertain economic future, Brazilians stuck with the incumbent for the first time in their history Sunday and re-elected Fernando Henrique Cardoso as president, exit polls showed.

Cardoso won with 56 percent of the vote compared to 29 percent for his closest rival, former labor leader Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva of the Workers Party, surveys conducted by the respected Ibope polling institute said. Ibope questioned 54,000 voters nationwide.

The outcome was no surprise. Cardoso, a 67-year-old sociologist, was the overwhelming favorite in Sunday's national elections, getting a boost from voters' fear of a deepening economic crisis.

"The important thing is not to switch drivers in the middle of the race," said Marcio Karte, a Rio newsstand dealer who voted for Cardoso.

About 106 million voters went to the polls Sunday to choose a president, 27 governors, all 513 federal deputies, a third of the 81-seat Senate and 1,405 state legislators. Voting is mandatory for Brazilians between the ages

of 18 and 70.

For weeks, the presidential race has been mostly a one-man show. Cardoso held steady even as Brazil lost the confidence of international investors — and despite his promises to cut spending and maybe raise taxes if elected.

NATO threatens strikes to end bloodshed

4 BELGRADE, Yugoslavia — Sharply opposed to NATO airstrikes on Yugoslavia, Russia sent its foreign and defense ministers Sunday to call on President Slobodan Milosevic, whose generals were preparing to defend the country against an assault.

NATO is threatening attacks to end seven months of bloodshed in Kosovo — despite signs Serbs may be ready for a compromise on how the rebellious Serb province should be governed.

Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov and Defense Minister Igor Sergeev met with Milosevic, Serbian President Milan Milutinovic, and Yugoslavia's top defense officials.

Kosovo is in southern Serbia, the dominant of two republics remaining in Yugoslavia.

A statement from Milosevic's office issued after the meeting said any NATO strike would be

an "act of aggression" and asserted that in Kosovo the overall situation is "improving daily."

Russia is the Serbs' main ally, sharing bonds of religion and joint Slavic roots.

Serbian police and the Yugoslav army have routed separatist Kosovo Albanian rebels during the seven-month crackdown. The conflict has killed hundreds — most of them ethnic Albanian civilians — and driven hundreds of thousands of villagers from their homes.

Forest officials defend policy on wolverines

5 KLAMATH FALLS — Winema National Forest officials are dismissing claims by environmental groups that the forest is not considering that wolverines that may be living on a proposed timber sale.

Officials say the wolverine, a threatened species in Oregon since 1973, not only is part of the forest's management plan, but that workers have been searching in vain for the animal all summer, but have found none.

The Oregon Natural Resources Council and 22 other conservation groups have appealed the proposed 2,110-acre Cold Springs Switchback timber sale on the Winema's Klamath Ranger District. The timber sale would yield 13.8 million board feet of timber.

ONRC spokesman Wendell Wood said the groups want to protect wolverines in an ecosystem that spans 350,000 acres in the southern Oregon Cascades and includes the proposed timber sale area.

The wolverine was proposed for listing under the federal Endangered Species Act in 1994. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service found insufficient grounds for a listing, but federal and state biologists have been trying to identify local wolverine populations.

Wood said nearly 300,000 acres of the ecosystem are already protected by the Sky Lakes Wilderness Area and Crater Lake National Park.

— The Associated Press



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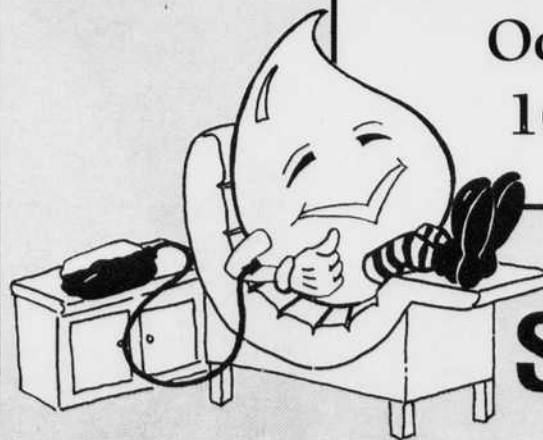


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