A high-tech-investigation group initiated by Cal Poly's University Police to help Central California law-enforcement agencies solve computerized crime has won an award from the California College and University Police Chiefs Association.

The association presented its Award of Distinction to University Police Officer Jeff Joynt and Chief Tony Aeilts last week at its annual conference, held at South Lake Tahoe.

Joynt and Officers John Edds and Mike Kennedy began developing the investigations group in 2000 to share the high-tech expertise of Cal Poly staff and faculty members with police agencies in the region.

Last September the group officially became the Central California Chapter of the High-Tech Crime Investigation Association International. The unit now includes representatives of police agencies in San Luis Obispo, Kern, Kings, Santa Barbara and Tulare counties as well as the Highway Patrol, the FBI, district attorney's offices and corporations such as Verizon and Internet service providers.

So far the high-tech unit has helped regional agencies investigate and solve more than 20 crimes that were perpetrated with -- or could be investigated with -- computer technology, including homicide, insurance fraud, identify theft and stalking of children on the Internet.

University Police officers have also provided high-tech training to fellow officers in other agencies.

Before the group was formed, Aeilts said, Central California police investigators often had to rely on help with cyber crime from overwhelmed state and federal agencies, which often caused serious investigative delays.
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