



Police equipment is real eyeful

By **Matt Hanley**
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GENEVA — Kane County Sheriff's employees had their first look this week at new eye-scan technology that could help recover abducted children.

Wednesday morning, representatives from The Child Project delivered four iris scan machines in black briefcases about the size of a laptop computer. Kane County deputies explored the software that will be used to take high resolution pictures of the inside of a person's eye, which are cleaner and more accurate than fingerprints.

According to Robert Melley, Child Project vice president, a typical fingerprint has between 75 and 80 identifying characteristics and can fade as a person ages. But the eye has 235 different unique traits which never dissipate during a person's life.

Thanks to a grant, the Kane County sheriff's office is the first police department in Illinois to receive this technology. Capt. Ron Smith hopes parents will enroll their kids and help the county create a substantial database. The eye scan might also be used to identify children who were involved in a car accident where adults were unable to speak.

Guards also will use the equipment to photograph inmates on their way into and, then, out of, the jail — ensuring no one can switch bracelets in an effort to escape.

Wednesday, Smith also was surprised by the equipment's possible use in scanning the irises of seniors. Although, there are still some logistics to work out, Smith could see a time when Alzheimer's or dementia patients could be registered in case they became lost and confused.

"I'm in favor of it, but I'm not sure how we'll do it," Smith said. "At this point, the uses are probably endless."

The entire equipment consists of a briefcase and laptop computer, which are easy to transport. The person simply looks into a small circle on the screen, the computer prompts them to "please open your eyes a little wider" and snaps a painless, non-invasive picture.

To date, there are 25,000 children registered — mostly on the East Coast — and the goal is to have 5 million kids in the system by 2011. So far, Melley said the system has not been used to re-unite a child with a family.

Smith said the sheriff's office will hold open enrollment for Kane County residents once a month, although those dates have not yet been scheduled.

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