



Your iris is unique and very identifiable

Text & Photos By BELINDA LARSEN Assistant News Editor

Butler County Sheriff's office Sgt. Phil Wickwire and Deputy Chris Semisch shared a innovative technology at a recent Butler County Council on Aging Board of Directors meeting held at the Augusta Senior Center. Those attending the meeting watched a demonstration of Iris Recognition. The concept is to use the iris (the colored portion of the eye, around the pupil) as a means of uniquely identifying each person.

Every iris is unique and does not change over the person's lifetime, therefore making using its usage to identify people even better than fingerprinting. Unlike fingerprinting, there is no need for contact to take place as the camera can be viewing the eyes from inches away. By storing the characteristics of the iris in a coded format it is easy for a particular image of an iris to be searched for in a databank.

Last December, the Butler County Sheriff's Office unveiled their new iris recognition equipment, which was obtained through a grant from the K.T. Wiedemann Foundation. The technology is part of the Children's Identification and Location Database or Child Project. The Child Project is a nationwide database that allows law enforcement to locate and positively identify people.

Butler County has the only system in the state and one of only 30 across the nation.

Sgt. Wickwire said, "Not only is this technology good for identifying children, but is useful for adults stricken with Alzheimer's or dementia. We can save lives and return them home to their loved ones," he continued, "I have to hand it to Sheriff Craig Murphy -- he has supported this program 100 percent."

Wickwire explained that after a person's irises are "scanned," they will be given a 'dog tag' that would help authorities track them in the identification system, if the need arises.

The technology is non-intrusive -- the individual does not need to touch anything to use the system. Automatic voice prompting, auto focus, plus enrollment and recognition speed make the system easy to use. An individual is detected automatically upon approaching the digital camera. A glance at the camera lens from 3-10 inches distance

allows the camera to photograph the iris image, which is digitally processed into a 512-byte record.

Participation in iris recognition technology is strictly voluntary. Participants agree to enroll. The network is secure and encrypted passwords are used by only the administrators.

Sgt. Wickwire stated, "There is no fee to participate and people can choose to opt out of the system at any time."

Both Wickwire and Deputy Semisch advised that children five and above are recommended for the program, as it is difficult to get very young children to sit still for the process. A form requesting basic information will need to be completed before the iris scan, which takes only 6-8 minutes.

The Sheriff's office is considering taking the technology to nursing facilities and senior centers. Anyone that would like a loved one entered into the system, is asked to contact the Butler County Sheriff's Office in El Dorado at 316-322-4254.