

*THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH*

## **Eye-scan database new tool for IDs**

*Thursday, July 27, 2006*

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MANSFIELD, Ohio — A digital image of Aleesha Butcher's bright eyes, blue and flecked with brown, popped up on the laptop computer screen.

The software went to work, scanning her iris — the colored portion around the pupil — to convert its unique characteristics into a 688-digit number.

Within seconds of tapping into a national database, a match of the baby blues was found, providing a full-face image of the smiling 5-year-old and her identifying information.

The Richland County sheriff's office plans to use technology to literally keep an eye on the community's children.

Iris-recognition biometric technology potentially will identify abducted children, runaways, wandering Alzheimer's patients and sex offenders.

A special digital camera produces images of the iris to yield unique identifying information more accurate than fingerprints, said Sean Mullin, president of the CHILD project: Children's Identification and Location Database.

Sheriff J. Steve Sheldon said the system will be trotted out at schools, festivals and other events to capture iris images and deliver the data to the CHILD computers in Phoenix.

Law-enforcement agencies that participate in the program will be able to scan the eyes of children and others and access the database to come up with names and addresses.

Each iris contains 266 unique characteristics, differing even between right and left and in identical twins. Iris images — or rather their ID numbers — can be searched more quickly than fingerprint images, Mullin said.

But iris-recognition technology has its limits. It cannot be used to identify bodies, for example, because eyes immediately deteriorate upon death, Mullin said.

Richland County's \$28,932 system is the second in Ohio. The Summit County sheriff's office acquired the first last fall. The iris database is in its infancy, containing fewer than 100,000 images.

Deputy Rick Gunder, whose granddaughter, Aleesha, became the first local child enrolled in the free, voluntary program, looks forward to working with kids to catalog their irises.

Knowing the information is stored in a national database and can help identify an ill, injured or abducted child should provide parents a sense of reassurance, he said.

"But I hope we never have to refer back to it," Gunder said.