

By their eyes you know them

Plymouth sheriff, 3 others unveil new way to find missing people

By **LINDSAY TAUB**
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PLYMOUTH — When it comes to using anatomy and technology to find missing children, the eyes have it.

Sheriffs from four counties joined forces yesterday to launch a database that they say will help identify missing people by scanning their irises.

The sheriffs, from Plymouth, Barnstable, Dukes and Nantucket counties, became the first in the nation to unveil a regional database, part of the nationwide Children's Identification and Location Database (CHILD) Project, which uses the iris-recognition technology to identify missing persons.

"Today marks a significant milestone, a quantum leap forward, in our ability to help identify missing and exploited children," Plymouth County Sheriff Joseph McDonald said.

The technology identifies a person by capturing a high-resolution digital photograph of the iris, the round, colored membrane that surrounds the pupil of the eye. The technology can distinguish between twins and left and right eyes. Lasik surgery and damage to the eye do not affect the physical characteristics of the iris; it is considered fully developed after a child is 6 months old.

Iris recognition measures up well against fingerprints, which can be damaged or inaccurate. In more than 2 million iris cross-comparisons, there were no false matches, according to a study by the Center for Mathematics and Scientific



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Joseph Presley, 8, of Marshfield holds an identification card he received through a program launched yesterday by sheriffs in four Massachusetts counties, including Plymouth County. The program uses iris recognition technology to identify missing people.

Computing.

Iris recognition also is fast and cost-effective. The imaging equipment cost each sheriff's department \$25,000, and once the database is functional, there are minimal maintenance costs, if any at all, said John

Birtwell, a spokesman for McDonald, the Plymouth County sheriff.

Helping sheriffs raise awareness of the project yesterday was Magi Bish, whose daughter Molly was abducted from her lifeguard position in Warren in 2000 and whose

remains were found in 2003.

With a recording of the the Sarah McLachlan song "Angel" playing, Magi Bish presented a montage of photographs that told "Molly's story." The show drew tears from many of the parents and sheriffs in attendance.

"We want to ensure that no other child, no other family goes through the same situation again," Bish said. "I lost a daughter but gained a mission."

Sheriffs demonstrated the technology with the help of 8-year-old Joseph Presley of Marshfield. In two minutes, a technician entered into the database Joseph's biographical and demographic information, took a photograph, scanned both irises and printed an identification card. Within seconds of being rescanned for purposes of finding a match, Joseph's photograph popped up on the laptop screen.

The only drawback is that a child must be sitting in front of the scanner in order to find a match in the database.

Authorities cited a case in Las Vegas in which a child was forced into prostitution and was arrested 13 times with fake identification before she was found dead.

"She would have been identified the first time if we had this technology in place," said Kevin O'Reilly, vice president of the CHILD Project.

Participation in the database is voluntary and open to all. Sheriffs will take the scanner and laptop computers to county fairs, festivals, malls and community events across the region in an attempt to build the database. Instead of taking fingerprints at this year's Marshfield Fair, sheriffs will scan irises.

The fair will run from Aug. 19 to Aug. 28.

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