

SIERRA STAR

Tracking system available in Madera County

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Child identification system will
help locate missing children

Madera County Sheriff John Anderson recently announced his endorsement for a new child identification project designed to locate missing children.

Iris Biometric Recognition Technology is the first of its kind introduced to law enforcement officials nationwide.

Madera County is among 14 members of the National Sheriff's Association to endorse the Children's Identification and Location database that was unveiled recently by the Nation's Missing Children's Organization (NMCO).

Other counties that endorse the database: Colusa, Del Norte, Imperial, Inyo, Lake, Madera, Mariposa, Mono, Plumas, San Benito, San Joaquin, Sutter, Yolo and Yuba counties.

The cost of the set-up can run between \$25,000 and \$150,000, depending on the type of system an agency needs. Fortunately for Madera County, the system is funded by grant dollars secured by NMCO and is available at no cost.

"That means our struggle to protect our kids won't cost the department, the county or the citizens of Madera County a dime," Sheriff Anderson said. The program will provide law enforcement agencies with a computer system capable of photographing pictures of a child's iris, which is then entered into the database clearinghouse headquartered in Phoenix, Ariz.

The program is designed to locate runaways or victims of kidnapping. It is also used to maintain positive identification of all inmates incarcerated in county jails.

The iris code system is similar to fingerprinting, but nothing is touched, therefore the system is germ-free.

Like fingerprints, each iris is unique. Once the photo is entered into the system, a response is available within three to 10 seconds. But, the system only works if the person has been previously entered into the database.

The project launched recently with 1,100 participating sheriff's departments nationwide. It will take approximately three years to fully implement the system. The Children's Identification and Location Database (CHILD) project is a secure nationwide network and registry maintained by the NMCO and National Center for Missing Adults (NCMA).

NMCO has been a member of the Association for Missing and Exploited Children's Organization (AMECO) since 1996.

The CHILD project will enable law enforcement and social service agencies throughout the country to locate and positively identify missing children and adults with iris recognition technology.

The project can compare unique features contained in the iris against a database of individuals who enroll throughout the country to determine the identity of an individual.

The system is strictly voluntary and parents and guardians can participate in the CHILD project even if they don't want their child's iris biometric information and related data stored in the national database.

This option and process eliminates any instances where a parent or guardian may be concerned about "databasing." The parent or guardian retains sole custody of the data and information until needed.

Parents or guardians who don't want their child's information electronically transferred to the database may instruct a deputy to provide an identification card complete with the encrypted biometric data.

Depending upon the agency producing the identification cards, parents and guardians will take home an encoded bar code with a magnetic strip on a smart card chip.

As a fingerprint and DNA kits, the parent or guardian will have the information available should the need arise to help locate the child. If the child is missing and parents or guardians want to enter the data into the national registry, they may bring in the identification card into a participating sheriff's office and have the encrypted data read and transmitted to the registry - which will provide the information to other participating agencies.

NMCO said it will take roughly three years before the system is operating nationwide, but as with Operation Lost and Found, a project Sheriff Anderson launched last year to assist our seniors, Anderson said he is convinced the program will prove worthwhile.

"The program is for our children and if it takes three years to get the entire country on board, then it takes three years, but Madera County is ready now," Anderson said.

The Nation's Missing Children's Organization and National Center for Missing Adults is a non-profit agency providing nationwide assistance to law enforcement and families of missing persons. For more information regarding the project, log onto www.thechildproject.org.

The Sierra Star

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