

Iris scan lets officials see who's missing

By NICOLE MARSHALL World Staff Writer
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Tulsa and Oklahoma counties have joined to bring the state new technology that will allow law enforcement officers to identify within seconds found children and adults who have been reported missing.

The system, based on iris recognition and biometric technology -- which deals with statistics and mathematical analysis -- allows parents and family members to join a nationwide network that catalogs the unique image of the registrant's eyes.

If people who are missing leave their hometown or state, authorities in the jurisdiction where they are found can quickly confirm their identity, even if they are unable to tell authorities who they are.

Tulsa County Sheriff Stanley Glanz said he learned about the system's manufacturer, Biometric Intelligence & Identification Technologies of Plymouth, Mass., while attending a conference last year.

Glanz said he and Oklahoma County Sheriff John Whetsel worked together to obtain the technology. Each Sheriff's Office has its own system.

At a press conference Wednesday, Glanz launched the Children's Identification and Location Database -- or CHILD -- Project in the state.

"We can take a photograph of the human eye -- specifically the iris," he said. "The iris works really like a fingerprint, and there are no two irises alike."

The CHILD Project is a secure nationwide network and registry that allows law enforcement agencies to positively identify people who have been found after they were reported missing.

"It just takes a couple of seconds to identify someone with an iris scan -- really quicker and better identification than fingerprints," Glanz said.

Kevin O'Reilly, director of communications for Biometric Intelligence & Identification Technologies, said the company is "extremely pleased to introduce this technology to the state of Oklahoma."

He explained that every iris -- the eye's colored part -- has a pattern of flecks that make it unique. A person's left eye is different from the right eye, and even identical twins won't have identical irises.

"The good thing about the technology is that it is not replacing DNA, not replacing dental records and not replacing photographs," O'Reilly said. "What it is doing is giving the sheriff a new high-technology tool to quickly identify missing children and adults."

The network and registry, which has been operational for only a year or so, is in use in 22 states. About 80,000 people have registered in the U.S.

The cost for the base system is \$25,000, which came from the Sheriff's Office's general budget, Glanz said.

Some other jurisdictions have used the technology in their jails, and in the future, Glanz said, he would like to use it at the Tulsa Jail. Sometimes inmates impersonate other inmates who are being released, and with the new technology, jail workers would be able to ensure that the right person is set free.

Additional equipment will have to be purchased before the iris-scanning technology can be used at the jail, Glanz said.

One other law enforcement agency has decided to use the iris-recognition technology in the registration of sex offenders, authorities said.

"There are so many applications for this; we are just starting to scratch the surface," O'Reilly said.

Parents who would like to register their children for free can go to the Sheriff's Office at First Street and Denver Avenue, Glanz said. He said he also would like to have the technology available so that children can be registered at the Tulsa State Fair.

Nicole Marshall 581-8459
nicole.marshall@tulsaworld.com



Phillip Hollins, 16, of Tulsa prepares to have his irises scanned Wednesday, while his aunt, Tulsa County Sheriff's Deputy E.T. Truewell (left) watches Deputy Rex Woodfork learn to use the scanning software under the tutelage of Tom Welby (pointing), development director for the system's manufacturer.
ROBERT S. CROSS / Tulsa World