Keeping track of kids goes high-tech

Jordan Muhlestein
Standard-Examiner staff
jmuhlestein@standard.net

Weber sheriff first in state to use system

OGDEN -- Weber County has a new tool to identify and protect children and other at-risk individuals.

The Children's Identification and Location Database (**CHILD) Project** system was installed Friday at the Weber County Sheriff's Office, the first law enforcement agency in the state to have the system.

The system, operated by the Nation's Missing Children Organization, uses specialized equipment to obtain a scan of a person's iris, the colored part of the eye. The information is put in a national database.

Sheriff Brad Slater said his office is often asked to help parents with child-identification programs, and having the record of a child's iris scan available nationally will give searchers one more tool to find lost children.

"We do these things as a community service," he said. "This is another component of crime prevention."

Slater said the new program will not replace fingerprints and DNA samples, but serve as a complement to them.

The $25,000 system, which includes an iris-scanning camera and a laptop computer, is portable and will be used throughout the county.

To pay for the equipment, the sheriff's office spent $10,000, and a $15,000 corporate match was organized by the **CHILD Project**, Slater said.

"When we learned about this in March, we re-evaluated the budget to be able to match the corporate donations," he said.

The system will first be available to the public Aug. 9 at the Weber County Fair, Slater said. Deputies will man a booth offering iris scans.

Once children's information is in the national database, parents will receive printed copies, which include bar codes with their iris information, Capt. Klint Anderson said.

The information can then be kept with an emergency identification kit including a photograph, fingerprints and a DNA sample.

After the fair, the system will be made available to community groups, Anderson said. The system will be focused on helping the at-risk populations of children and the mentally impaired, such as those with Alzheimer's who wander away and don't know who they are.

The sheriff's office will make announcements about opportunities to use the machine, Anderson said. The scans will be provided at no charge.

"A lot of senior centers are interested, as well as PTA groups," he said.

Sean Mullin, president/CEO of the Phoenix-based **CHILD Project**, said the system works for people of all ages because of the iris's unique identifying abilities.

"The eyes are the body's most unique feature," he said, adding that iris scans are 12 times as accurate as fingerprints alone.

The iris is not completely developed until a person is about a year old, Mullin said. After that, it doesn't change and can be easily recognized electronically, even after eye surgery.

"The camera can scan people who've had LASIK or are wearing contacts or glasses," he said. "It works with most types of eye disorders."

Mullin addressed privacy concerns about the technology, saying enrollment is completely voluntary. Also, in order to be scanned, a person must be within 10 inches of the camera, so no one could be scanned unknowingly.

The **CHILD Project** is growing throughout the country, he said, with Utah being the 20th state to join. Nationwide, 1,648 sheriffs in 46 states have expressed interest in the program, he said.

At least 13 other Utah sheriffs have expressed interest in the program and are working to obtain the necessary funding, Mullin said.

In the meantime, the Weber County Sheriff's Office is willing to share the equipment and will consider requests from other agencies, Anderson said.

By the numbers:

In the U.S., as of Feb. 1, 2006:

103,949 missing people

62,923 are children

19,689 listed as endangered

7,660 listed as involuntarily missing

1.8 million Alzheimer's patients

are known to wander

How does **iris recognition** work?

Every human iris is unique and unchanging. A quick, harmless digital photograph of a person's eye is taken and compared with a database. Iris scans are highly accurate, with no false matches in more than 2 million comparisons.

Where is **iris recognition** used?

It is used in public safety, health care, aviation and education. Jails can scan inmates, making sure no one is released due to mistaken identity. Airports can allow passengers to register their scans to streamline boarding, and hospitals can use scans to regulate who has access to patient information or newborn babies.

Source: The **CHILD Project**