

Wood Sheriff's Dept. to be first in state to take part in new ID system

By **BRETT DUNLAP**, Staff Writer

PARKERSBURG — The Wood County Sheriff's Department will be the first agency in West Virginia to participate in a new identification system that can help identify missing children and adults.

The sheriff's department will be the first agency in West Virginia to be apart of the Children's Identification and Location Database (CHILD) Project, a nationwide system and registry to identify and locate missing people through the use of Iris Recognition Biometric Technology.

“The Wood County Sheriff's Department is proud that we will be the first agency in West Virginia to implement this new technology where we will be able to take a digital picture of a child's irises, which is unique in every individual,” said Deputy B.A. Murphy who helped place the system locally. “The biggest advantage is it would only take about five seconds to verify a child's identity.”

The system is in place in 12 states with West Virginia as the 13th state, officials said, adding agencies in four more states will become a part of the system during March.

The CHILD Project database is hosted by The Nation's Missing Children Organization and National Center for Missing Adults, a nonprofit agency providing nationwide assistance to law enforcement and families of missing persons.

According to the U.S. Department of Justice, more than 2,000 children are reported missing each day in the United States and there are more than 47,000 active missing adult cases, said Kevin O'Reilly, director of communications for the CHILD Project. As of Feb. 1, there are 311 active missing persons' cases in West Virginia, he said, adding of those, 198 are

juvenile cases.

In some cases, law enforcement agencies have had people in custody who had been reported missing. However, traditional identifying methods take too long to complete before they had to let them go, the person had falsified identification or they were not able to properly identify themselves out of fear or for some other reason.

“With fingerprinting, it can be as short as two hours and as long as two months before that information becomes available,” O’Reilly said.

Iris recognition biometric technology positively determines the identity of an individual by capturing a high-resolution digital photograph of an individual’s iris, officials said adding the technology can tell the difference between twins or even an individual’s right and left eye. The technology is non-intrusive as the person just has to look at a camera.

“What the camera does is takes a picture of the colored part of the eye, the iris,” O’Reilly said. “The iris has 512 unique characteristics.”

Those characteristics are matched against what is in the database and a person can be identified in the matter of seconds, he said.

Plans are already in place to extend this service to the senior population.

“Our population is aging and people are suffering from Alzheimer’s Disease and dementia and they might wander away from their nursing homes,” O’Reilly said. “We want to be able to identify these people quickly if they are found and be able to return them to their family members.

“I think there are some great opportunities for both ends of the spectrum with the young and old.”

Murphy said the sheriff’s department will be available for school carnivals, fire department ice-cream socials, the Homecoming Festival and the West Virginia Interstate Fair and other venues to register interested people.

Interested schools and nursing home facilities can also contact the sheriff’s department for more information or set up a time to have people registered.

Registration involves getting the proper permission from parents or guardians; giving basic information such as name, age, address and telephone number; and having the picture taken. The program does not ask for a social security number.

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