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CHILD Project to help find missing kids

By Annie McCallum
Staff Writer

SNOW HILL -- Rachel Allman made history Friday. The 12-year-old Snow Hill Middle School student became the first participant in Maryland's Children Identification and Location Database Project.

"I'm tickled," her father, Bill Allman, said.

The Worcester County Sheriff's Office will implement the CHILD Project, which uses new technology to identify missing children based on their irises. The Sheriff's Office unveiled the project at the Worcester County Education Center on Friday.

Rachel was there to sing the National Anthem, but quickly became the first participant in the CHILD Project.

"I think it will help find kids fast if anything happens," her father said, as he marveled at the small camera that quickly captured a very detailed picture of Rachel's eyes.

The camera that snaps the image uses iris recognition biometric technology. Once a picture of a child's irises are taken, it is then stored in a database with the child's information, including parents' names and home address. The registry is secure and is accessible to law enforcement and social service agencies.

The database will be hosted by The Nation's Missing Children Organization and National Center for Missing Adults.

Worcester County is the first and only county in Maryland to make use of the technology.

Robert E. Melley, CHILD Project vice president and chief operating officer, said the system quickly IDs missing persons and is the most accurate way to do so.

"It's the technology of the future and it's actually here," he said.

Worcester County Sheriff Charles Martin said he is thrilled his office can be the first to make the most of the sophisticated technology.

"It's a positive move and I'm elated to get it under way," Martin said. "It's a good thing for kids."

It is also a good thing for the elderly, officials said. The technology will also be used on Alzheimer patients and those with dementia who might wander.

Officials pointed out the program is strictly voluntary. It takes only a few minutes to enroll a child in the system, project officials said.

Melley said individuals can be positively identified in about three seconds. The cost to implement the technology is \$25,000, Melley said, which he believes is a small price to pay for something so worthwhile.

Jon Andes, Worcester County Schools superintendent, also witnessed the technology in action.

"This is a wonderful tool for us to use to protect our children. Once again, Worcester County is in the forefront, providing services to our children and our families," Andes said.

