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Fingerprinting children gives parents reason to feel safe

By: Dan Strumpf

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Ian McCloe, 8, plopped down in a chair at South Abington Park, looks into the Web cam, and smiled.

"Ready? One, two, three," Rob Pfeiffer said.

Mr. Pfeiffer, a representative with Court TV, presses a button on his laptop and Ian's mugshot instantly appears on the screen.

He then took Ian's right thumb and pressed it on a small gray device.

"OK, now this thumb," Mr. Pfeiffer said, as he takes a thumbprint of Ian's other thumb.

Next, the nearby printer spit out a sheet with Ian's photo, his thumbprints and spaces to fill in his personal information, doctor's information and physical features. The process took about 20 seconds.

"There, now it's done,"

Mr. Pfeiffer said to Sharon Piotrowski, the mother of Ian's friend, who brought him to the park. "This is for you. This is the only record that exists."

Ian was one of hundreds of kids who lined up at a booth at South Abington Park Saturday afternoon to have their mugshots and thumbprints taken. Court TV provided the free service.

But the children were not bound for court. Rather, the photo and prints were turned over to parents to file away in case of an emergency, said Mr. Pfeiffer, a representative for Court TV who ran the event.

"It's a great thing to do for the community, to give to parents in an unlikely and unfortunate event that they would need it," Mr. Pfeiffer said.

Frank Gerardi, who lives in Clarks Summit, brought his two sons, Nicholas, 8, and Jacob, 4, to the park. He says having their personal information on file makes him feel safer.

"It's a good thing to have," Mr. Gerardi said. "Hopefully we'll never have to use it, but just in case."

Cathy Stone, who brought sons Thomas, 6, and Matthew, 3, will put the print-outs in a safe deposit box at her bank.

"I think it's important, with the kidnapping and all that stuff, to have that on file if anything happens to them," she said.

The event, which took place alongside the Abington Farmers' Market and a chicken barbeque, was part of a nationwide program by Court TV to promote child safety. More than 100,000 children have been fingerprinted through the program since it began in 2002.

Contact the writer: dstrumpf@timeshamrock.com

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