

## **Breakfast Optimists Offers Child ID At Washington School**

**BY JENNIFER PERYAM, Times-Union Staff Writer**

Parents who register their child at Washington Elementary School will have the opportunity to assure the safety of their student before the school year begins.

The Warsaw Breakfast Optimist Club is partnering with SafeAssured ID of Wausau, Wisc., to conduct child identification enrollments. The enrollments will be conducted during registration times at the school this week and Monday.

This is the first year the program is being offered at the school. It is geared to protect children by collecting information about the child in instances of a disappearance.

The collected information will better equip law enforcement and the media to find and get the word out if a child is reported missing.

Optimist Club members will conduct the enrollments during registration times on the following days this week at Washington Elementary School: Thursday, noon to 6 p.m.; Friday, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.; and Monday, noon to 6 p.m.

Former Optimist Club President Ron Donkers attended an Optimist Club international convention in 2005 where the enrollment program was presented. Donkers challenged the local club to bring the program to Warsaw.

The program is in affiliation with the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children and the National School Board Association.

The enrollments are being co-sponsored by the Kosciusko County Sheriff's Department. The department donated \$2,000 to purchase additional kits and wrote an endorsement letter supporting the program last week.

Fred Nieter, chairman of the project and Optimist Club member, said the club has conducted the enrollment at two other locations and has received positive feedback.

"We conduct this project with the hopes of a child never coming up missing," Nieter said. "Using technology helps us find children if they are reported missing."

The Optimist Club completed enrollments in April 2005 at the Warsaw Community Public Library. There were 21 children between the ages of 5 to 17 years old who were enrolled.

The enrollment also was conducted at the Boys and Girls Club of Kosciusko County and Baker Youth Clubs in July. There were 53 children who enrolled.

Nieter said the enrollment program has received positive feedback from parents.

“We’ve had nothing but enthusiastic and positive responses from parents towards the program,” Nieter said.

“The identification information is like insurance, you hope you never have to use it, but it’s good and valuable to have.”

The identification process provides parents with the capability of distributing critical information about their child to police agencies and the media if their child is missing.

Nieter said the club currently has 650 kits and is planning to purchase more.

The enrollment process involves entering personal data provided about the student into a computer.

The parent fills out an enrollment form containing personal identification information about the child such as birth marks and a family code word or phrase.

A digital photograph is then taken for an identification card. The card includes information such as the student’s enrollment date, age, height, eye color and weight.

A digital video of the child walking and talking is then taken.

“This detects the child’s mannerisms as they answer questions about subjects such as their favorite sport or the town they live in,” Nieter said.

The final step in the process is digitally recording all 10 of the child’s fingerprints.

All of the information is burned onto a mini-CD and is given to the parent in a jeweled case.

“We encourage parents to keep the CD in a kitchen cabinet where it will be easy to find if needed,” Nieter said.

The enrollment form containing the student’s personal information is shredded. Encrypted personal data included on the mini-CD can only be recovered by a police agency, Nieter said.

The Optimist Club purchased the equipment in Spring 2005 from SafeAssured-ID with the help from several local organizations.

The club contributed \$5,000 towards purchasing 550 kits. Grants from the Bill and Helen Dye Trust, The Kosciusko County REMC Operation Round-Up and the Kosciusko County Community Foundation also helped purchase kits.

Local law enforcement said the program is beneficial in better equipping them with the tools needed to find missing children.

“If the unthinkable could occur such as a child missing or being involved in an accident, the identification information collected can assist law enforcement in finding or identifying the child at a faster rate,” said Aaron Rovenstine, county sheriff.

Warsaw Police Chief Steve Foster also supports the program.

“We are fortunate that we live in a community where we don’t have as much criminal activity as other cities, but that doesn’t mean we are not void of something tragic happening to children,” Foster said.

He said the program is an opportunity to collect identification data in case it is needed.

Nieter said the club’s goal is to provide the opportunity for every child in kindergarten through middle school in Kosciusko County the opportunity to be enrolled in the program.

There is no charge to the parents for the identification kits, but donations will be accepted to help defray the \$10 cost for each kit.

Parents can purchase additional kits for \$6 each. Additional identification cards cost \$2.

Administrators who wish to have child identification enrollment at their school, or those who wish to contribute funds toward purchasing additional kits may contact Optimist Club member Tim Hofer at 269-5882.

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