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Madison County team will handle missing-children cases

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EDWARDSVILLE – The Madison County Sheriff’s Department is setting up Illinois’ second child abduction response team.

Sheriff Bob Hertz announced the effort today, which is observed as National Missing Children’s Day.

Hertz said he could not recall any cases of children abducted by strangers in the county in recent years but said it would be helpful to have plans, procedures and volunteers in readiness whenever a child is lost or abducted.

“If and when that happens, we are going to be able to hit the ground running,” he said.

Hertz said 12 sheriff’s deputies and other police officers from the county attended a four-day training session last week offered by the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children. He said the center would provide ongoing support and training.

Part of the plan is to raise as many as 300 civilian volunteers to assist law enforcement when a child is missing. He said they should be physically fit, available to serve on short notice and able to pass a background check. The sheriff said information on how to volunteer would be made available within a few weeks.

Hertz said volunteers would receive training and would never knowingly be placed in harm’s way.

The program “comes at little or no cost,” but is mostly a matter of planning, training and coordination, Hertz said.

The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children is headquartered in Alexandria, Va., and was founded by John Walsh, whose son was abducted and murdered. Hertz said Lake County is the only county in Illinois that now has a team certified by the center. He said he did not know of any others closer than Springfield, Mo.