



Sheriff seeks help in child abductions

By [SANFORD J. SCHMIDT](#)

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EDWARDSVILLE - Madison County Sheriff Bob Hertz said Tuesday he never has seen a case of a stranger abducting a child, but he is looking for 300 pairs of eyes and ears, in case it ever happens here.

Hertz held a news conference Tuesday, National Missing Children's Day, to announce the formation of a Child Abduction Response Team.

One of the key elements is to have 300 people lined up to search for a missing child, if they are needed.

"I hope that it never happens, but we want to put 300 pairs of boots on the ground within an hour," Hertz said.

"It's similar to buying a fire engine. You put it in a garage and hope you never have to use it, but I am not going to be caught on the left foot," Hertz said.

In the past few weeks, there have been three reports of strangers trying to pick up children in Madison County, but luckily, none of the children accepted a ride, Hertz said.

The volunteers would be screened and would receive credentials. People who would travel 100 mph with guns blazing would be screened out in favor of people with common sense, good eyes and clean records, Hertz said.

The volunteers would be certified by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, based in Alexandria, Va. The Madison County team would be only the second such team in the state.

The national center was formed in 1984 by John Walsh, whose son was abducted and murdered. Walsh is now host of the popular television show "America's Most Wanted."

Hertz said 12 people from Madison County attended an initial four-day training session in St. Louis under the national center.

Attending were Capt. Brad Wells of the Madison County Sheriff's Department, who will lead C.A.R.T., and other members of the Sheriff's Department, as well as representatives from the Illinois State Police, Madison County State's Attorney's Office, Madison County Emergency Management Department, Madison County Child Advocacy Center, Roxana School District, ConocoPhillips and Riverbend Family Ministries.

The groups studied how to set up the C.A.R.T., a review of actual abduction cases throughout the country by people directly involved, statements from family members and tabletop exercises.

The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children will provide guidance, resources and training.

Hertz said he and his staff are in the midst of setting up the program, and they will seek certification later this year. They will put out a notice in the coming weeks, informing volunteers how to contact them to participate.

Hertz said the official designation as a C.A.R.T. has not come yet, but he is sure it will happen.

"This is going to happen. I'm that committed to it," the sheriff said. "There is nothing more traumatic for a society than the abduction and harming of one of its children."

sanfordschmidt@yahoo.com

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