Missing-Children Team Gets Help in Drive to Modernize

Police officer and artist Michael Streed and his volunteer team have long coveted a new computer program that enhances drawings of composites and age-progressed portraits, but the cost of the software was beyond their means.

Thanks to a $500 donation Monday from the Villa Park Women's League and an anonymous $1,000 contribution made earlier, however, they are a bit closer to their goal of buying new equipment.

An informal unit of the Orange Police Department, Streed's computer team is now using equipment bought in 1993 with a $25,000 grant from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children in Arlington, Va.

The team's work includes enhancing pictures of missing children, unidentified corpses and fugitives with age-progression techniques.

"The budget for this unit is zero," said Streed, a 37-year-old forensic artist. But this is my passion in life now," he said. "I've foregone transfers to better positions, and I've forgone trying to get promoted."

What his team would like is to buy the latest software, which would give them the capability to produce graphics and color posters of missing and abducted children, a project that is now limited by technology to only one missing-child case a month, Streed said.

To upgrade the equipment, the team launched a fund-raising drive two months ago, sending 200 letters to public service agencies asking for support, but there has been little response.

The Women's League gift was the first from a civic group.

The Adam Walsh Center in Orange is one of only two facilities in the state that produce technology-enhanced portraits of missing people.

Streed said he would like to expand. "The more work you do," he said, "the higher the chance you're going to solve one."

Anne Burke, a case worker at the Adam Walsh Center, said Streed's work is vital. "He has . . . the know-how to do age progressions so we would know what the children would look like," she said.

—LESLEY WRIGHT