

# THE PROGRESSIVE PATH TO A MISSING CHILD

**M**ike Streed is a cop—and one of California's most vital artists. Streed is a forensic illustrator whose drawings or enhanced photographs can help reunite a parent with a missing child or nab a long-lost criminal suspect. A master police officer for the city of Orange, he's considered a standout in his field. Now a new computer software program is making him an authority for the Western states.

In the late 1970s, Streed worked as a typical police sketch artist, but as the wave of missing children grew, he decided to turn his efforts toward finding kids. "Every bit of training I got, I wanted to learn more," he says. Over the last few years, his talents have led the way to finding not only missing youths, but also a number of criminal suspects.

In layman's terms, forensic illustration means creating an illustration projecting physical evidence where such evidence is lacking. A gifted forensic illustrator can take a school or family photo of a child who has been missing for years and, using the knowledge of anthropology and anatomy, accurately predict what that child would look like today.

Only three institutions in the United States teach the subject, including the Scottsdale School of Art in Scottsdale, Arizona, the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) at its Quantico, Virginia, headquarters, and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) in Arlington, Virginia.

Using new software packages developed by Santa Ana-based Infotec Development Inc., Streed can project bone growth and facial development even in very young children. The programs, called FaceKit and PhotoSketch, also offer the potential for smaller police departments to access forensic illustration techniques.

To project a child's appearance, Streed first interviews the parents with detectives. He then places the most recent photo available of the child on a flatbed color scanner to generate a

computer image that he can modify using software.

Is it guesswork? Not usually. In the cases of older children, the work is fairly predictable. "By the time a child is 6 or 7 years old, the growth in the cranium is [complete]," he says. "All the growth [from that point on] is from the nose and the lower facial area."

With crime victims, perfecting the illustration gets a little trickier. "You have to understand that you're dealing with someone's memory," he says. In the last year, he's received four requests for age projection on children, six for suspects, and one request for facial reconstruction from human remains.

Nationally, forensic illustrations have helped to identify 26 long-term missing children since 1990, plus dozens of cloaked criminals. And it must be working: The NCMEC has registered a 16 percent recovery rate in cases using the technique.

Streed was honored for his talent last September, when the NCMEC selected his city's department to become the Western Regional Age Progression Imaging Center. Streed's talents and technology now serve law-enforcement agencies from New Mexico to the state of Washington, but he'd also like to see the allocation of state funding for the imaging center, especially in light of last year's Polly Klaas kidnapping.

DNA tracing and genetic methods, Streed says, can't put the pieces together for every crime. "When you've got a witness and no other evidence, this is something that people will turn to time and time again."

For more information, call the city of Orange police department at 744-7390, or NCMEC at 800-843-5678. —E.E.

## Lawyers Care, Too

Not all lawyers are without heart—a large group of them are proving that they have a lot of it. For the past several years, the Orange County Trial Lawyers Association (OCTLA) has quietly raised funds for several charities in the Orange County area.

Working closely with the UC Irvine Medical Center, OCTLA donated approximately 200 infant car seats last year to families who could not afford them. OCTLA has also provided funds to cover the cost of PET (Positive Emission Tomography) Scans used to determine brain damage in patients. PET-Scans are so expensive that outside funds are usually needed to help cover the costs.

OCTLA President Lon Hurwitz says that the group raises some \$25,000 to \$30,000 per year for these charities. They also work closely with the Orange County Bar Association to

raise funds for such projects as the Public Law Center, which provides legal representation to those who cannot afford it.

OCTLA has also donated money to terminally ill children in past years. Current projects include donating \$2,000 worth of thermometers to UC Irvine Medical Center, as well as the car-seat program. "We see children in car accidents but we would like to keep children from riding in a car without a child seat," adds OCTLA's 2nd Vice President Susan Kelly.

To contact OCTLA, call 241-9623.

—Soo Y. Song



ILLUSTRATION: BRIAN RASZKA