

Next of Kin Registration is a valuable tool

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On Sept. 8, Ohio's Next of Kin Registration System was launched after 1976 Wayne graduate Carmela Wiant began a campaign in April 2007 to create a bill that would notify next of kin immediately, so their family members could be with their loved ones immediately. Recently, a press conference was held at the Huber Heights Police Division to evaluate the impact of the system.

Huber Heights Police Chief Robert Schommer was asked what the value of having next of kin information.

"It's extremely valuable," said Schommer. "It helps the family, it helps the victim as well for a medical emergency where someone might have fallen unconscious. It will certainly allow us to contact family members and next of kin that are crucial to help ensure medical treatment and for the Care Flight person."

Schommer said the next of kin/emergency contact enrollment movement is helpful to law enforcement and safety responders.

"Minutes save lives," said Schommer. "Many times in critical incidents, we spend many times minutes and hours attempting to locate family members and next of kin. We certainly encourage everybody to sign up for this free, simple but very valuable and effective tool."

Mike Rankin, Register of the

See KIN on Page 2A



Photo by Greg Smart

Carmela Wiant shows how easy it is to register for Ohio's Next of Kin Registration System, which she sought legislation for after her son, shown in the frame, was killed in an automobile accident. She is joined by Huber Heights Police Chief Robert Schommer who praised the value of the system to Ohio families and first responders.

NEXT OF KIN

Continued from Page 1A

Bureau of Motor Vehicles in Ohio, said that almost 80,000 people have voluntarily signed up for the next of kin emergency contact enrollment which he called "a real good rate of sign up."

Rankin said that in Ohio, there are approximately 7.9 million licensed drivers and another 800,000 state ID holders.

"We know it would probably take five years to get one half of 8.7 million signed up, that's what we're working on," said Rankin.

Rankin also stressed the importance of identification for children as an officer could pull up information on a child who may be missing or may have been abducted or injured.

"Our goal is to get as many children in Ohio the state ID because it's got next of kin database, that's the real connection there," said Rankin.

The Ohio ID card information is to be updated every four years. However, Rankin said for a very young child, it is desirable to update every two years. Rankin said that with a current photo, every police agency in Ohio would have access to the photo and could be transmitted electronically throughout the state or country if the child were missing.

"For \$8.50 it's truly the best buy there is," said Rankin of the Ohio ID card for children.

Rankin said if the child knows their name, the information could be accessed by law officers as there is a requirement that a minor child must designate a parent or guardian as one of the two next of kin.

"As the police chief said, next of kin has

tremendous health and safety benefits," said Rankin. "If you're in an auto accident or you have a medical emergency, you want to have people that know something about your medical conditions at the hospital and you want to get them there right away."

Carmela Wiant said 78,000 have signed up for the next of kin emergency contact enrollment. She said her husband has asked Montgomery County to place next of kin information on their water bill. She indicated 20 to 30 other counties have placed it on their water bills. The information was also included on the Huber Heights water bill recently.

Any holder of a valid Ohio driver license, commercial driver license, temporary permit or state of Ohio identification card will now have the option of providing the name and information of a contact person they wish to be notified in the event the individual is involved in a crash or emergency and is otherwise unable to communicate with the contact person.

Ohioans can now provide next of kin information for up to two contacts online (www.ohiobmvm.com) or through any BMV deputy registrar. For those over the age of 18, the contact person can be a nearby relative, friend or co-worker. Those under the age of 18 are required to provide a parent or guardian for the primary contact. This secure database will only be accessible to BMV employees and law enforcement officials.

For more information on Next of Kin Registration visit www.money-burge.com and for information on an Ohio ID card for a child, visit www.bmv.ohio.gov.