



Members of the Mechanicsburg FFA recently attended the 2008 World Dairy Expo and placed third at the event. Read more about their accomplishments on today's Page 3.

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WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 8, 2008

**THE MECHANICSBURG**

OVER 100 YEARS OF VILLAGE SERVICE

# TELEGRAM

*"The voice of Mechanicsburg"*

## Local mother hopes next of kin registration increases

By **BREANNE PARCELS**  
Staff Writer

Carmela Wiant had been waiting for more than two years for a moment that finally came Thursday.

Wiant, of Mechanicsburg, officially filed a next-of-kin emergency contact form with the local office of the Bureau of Motor Vehicles.

The forms became available in September as part of the Money-Burge Act, a state law named in part for Wiant's adult son, who was killed in a car crash in Columbus on Aug. 7, 2006.

"What it will do for other families, they will never know until it happens to them," she said. "No one should have to hear a hospital chaplain tell you over the phone that your only child is dead. That's not fair to any loved one, to be told that way."

Wiant and Linda Wuestenberg, mother of another fatal crash victim, "Stevie B." Burge, worked with state Sen. Keith Faber and state Rep. Jim McGregor to develop the bill to allow the BMV to establish a secure database for emergency notification of next of kin.

The database, which relies on voluntary information provided by licensed drivers, is accessible only by law enforcement in the case of an emergency, said Ohio Registrar Mike Rankin.



**REGISTRATION:** Ohio Registrar Mike Rankin, and Jayme Starkey of Rankin's northwest field office, left, look on as Carmela Wiant fills out a next-of-kin notification form Thursday at the Champaign County Bureau of Motor Vehicles. Wiant was instrumental in pushing for legislation which allowed the next-of-kin database to be created. Champaign County Clerk of Courts and Deputy Registrar Ed Preston, right, said the forms are available at the BMV, as well as the legal and title departments of the Clerk of Courts offices. (Photo by Breanne Parcels)

"The information can be a family member or trusted friend or neighbor," Rankin said of the emergency contact.

"This will save thousands of hours of police time, and will let the next of kin spend time at the hospital so they can

inform doctors of special needs. We're really cutting edge on this. The only other state with next-of-kin notification is Florida, and they didn't do it by statute. Because we did, it can't be changed if we get a new administration or a new registrar. It's permanent and it's protected, because we didn't want it to be subject to a public records search. Time is of the essence, that's the key thing in an emergency."

Champaign County Sheriff Brent Emmons agreed.

"It's going to help not just our department, but first responders in general," Emmons said. "There is so much chaos at accident scenes, and it's important to make contact with individuals who may help us understand how some crashes occurred, especially if it involved a medical situation, because we can't speak with victims when fire and EMS personnel are working on them trying to save their lives."

Wiant said the heartache from the loss of her son has not dimmed, but meeting a recipient of Money's organ donation in 2007 helped formulate a productive response to the grief. She began making calls to legislators, and with the support of Faber and McGregor, she and Wuestenberg were able to garner an over-

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## Registration

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whelming majority of votes for the bill, which was signed into law by Gov. Ted Strickland on May 1.

Rankin said to date, more than 32,000 people statewide have filed next-of-kin information since Sept. 8, but he was unable to give a breakdown of filings at the county level.

"I appreciate that so many people have signed up," Wiant said. "My goal

is to get the whole state of Ohio, and other states too."

"It could be a nationwide thing," Rankin agreed. "It has huge positive potential." The BMV set up the necessary data storage program at a one time cost of \$60,000, and also implemented a companion program to issue state identification for all children under the age of 18, Rankin said.

"We kicked off the

'ID R KIDS' program at the Ohio State Fair this summer and that information will also be in the database, so if say, a child is injured walking to school, the parents can be notified immediately," Rankin said. "It also provides law enforcement with a photo of the child in cases of those reported missing, and there's no minimum age."

There is a cost for the ID R KIDS cards.

"The value isn't in the plastic, it's that the photo and information can be accessed by police if needed," Rankin said.

Forms are available at the local BMV office, title and legal departments of the Champaign County Clerk of Courts and online at [www.bmv.ohio.gov](http://www.bmv.ohio.gov).