



ADVANCE PHOTO/TONY GARANNANTE

Kenneth Schweiger, left, gestures as he talks to searchers. His wife, Karen, is at right.

## The search goes on

By **LESLIE PALMA-SIMONCEK**  
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With the search for 12-year-old Jennifer Schweiger in its 11th day, police and volunteer searchers say the size of the sprawling Staten Island Developmental Center in Willowbrook is both hindering the investigation and allowing them to hold on to the hope that

the missing girl is alive and on the grounds.

"She's here," Karen Schweiger, Jennifer's mother, said yesterday. "I just feel my daughter is alive. We'll find her."

"There's always hope," one police officer said.

Police yesterday said they had  
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not questioned any of several suspects wanted in connection with the case. Although they are investigating the possibility that Jennifer, a 12-year-old Westerleigh girl who was born with Down's syndrome, may have fallen prey to one of several vagrants who reportedly live in SIDC's empty buildings, police have no concrete evidence that this is the case.

"We don't know if we have a crime or not," according to Lt. Louis Fiori, commander of the Staten Island Crimes Against Property Squad, which handles all missing persons cases.

Although the entrance and grounds of the nearly vacant SIDC complex are patrolled around the clock by New York State Peace Officers, people who work on the grounds and live in the area say homeless people have moved into some of the buildings.

A peace officer on duty yesterday said he has never seen any homeless people on the SIDC grounds. Fiori said the police have received no complaints from SIDC staff about vagrants.

SIDC officials and officials from the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, which runs the facility, could not be reached yesterday to comment on the situation.

Fiori said he has not yet received results from laboratory tests performed on blood-like smudges found on a wall of a room in Building 2 on Friday. The tests, which will take at least another day to complete, will determine whether the substance is blood and whether the type

matches Jennifer's.

Police returned yesterday to once again search the darkened, decrepit buildings at SIDC while volunteers, armed with tall walking sticks, searched through wooded areas behind many of the buildings on the 316-acre complex.

A Dalmatian provided by the Safe Way Search and Rescue Squad of Central New Jersey walked through many of the buildings and acted as though it had detected Jennifer's scent in Building 3, according to Mrs. Schweiger. The dog was accompanied by two women, one of whom carried a "scent bag" that included Jennifer's sneakers and undergarments.

Mrs. Schweiger said she remained hopeful yesterday as she waited for police and the dog to complete the search of Building 5 at the center. No clues were uncovered there.

Rumors circulated among the searchers that a suspect had been taken into custody but this turned out to be unfounded. Mrs. Schweiger said she wanted searchers to continue looking, even if a suspect had been found.

"I don't care about the guy," she said. "My daughter could be in one of these buildings."

Kenneth Schweiger, Jennifer's father, and police officers crawled through some of the miles of tunnels that connect all of the center's buildings. The tunnels were constructed to run steam pipes from the facility's central heating plant to its 28 buildings.

Officer Jeffrey Otchet from the 120th Precinct said the tunnels

are about three feet wide and three feet high. He and his partner, Officer Samuel Colon, said the tunnels are very hot and very dark.

"It's very hard to see anything down there," Otchet said.

Asked if he had given up hope of finding the child, Otchet said, "in a place like this, it's hard to say. If a guy knows anything about the tunnels, he could keep moving back and forth. A 12-year-old could move through these tunnels easily."

His opinion was shared by Mrs. Schweiger and other searchers. Anna Vira, a neighbor of the Schweiger's, said a force of 50 people should enter one building at a time and search it "from top to bottom" before moving to the next building. So far, searchers have not been allowed inside the vacant buildings.

At the time of her disappearance, Jennifer was wearing a pink "Sesame Street" T-shirt and pastel shorts and was carrying a yellow pocketbook. She is about 4 feet, 3 inches tall, weighs about 65 pounds and has brown hair and hazel eyes.

On July 9, witnesses reported seeing the child walking with a man described as about 60 years old, about 5 feet, 11 inches tall and with a slim build. He was said to have a bald spot on the back of his head.

Police have established a temporary command post in a firehouse at 875 Jewett Ave. Anyone with information about the girl is urged to call 447-4168. Calls will be kept confidential.

**Additional searchers are desperately needed. See editorial on Page B 14.**



Patricia Schweiger, right, waits with volunteers as they prepare to search a building.

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