



ADVANCE PHOTO / TONY CARANNANTE

Volunteers search Clove Lakes Park for Jennifer Schweiger.

Parents 'hanging in' in Jennifer's search

By GLENN CHAPMAN
ADVANCE STAFF WRITER

Jennifer Schweiger's parents continued to hope yesterday for the return of their daughter as detectives tried to glean new clues from interviews and tips, and volunteers defied the intense heat to search for the girl.

"We are hanging in there," said Jennifer's father, Ken Schweiger. "We keep praying and hoping that one of the leads will be the right one, the one that will take us to her."

The missing girl's parents, along with other members of the family and close friends, have been daily participants in the wide-spread search for Jennifer. The hunt began 17 days ago when the girl vanished from the street near her Wardwell Avenue home in Westerleigh.

Jennifer has Down's syndrome and congenital heart disease.

The Schweigers have received numerous calls from psychics offering help. Between family members and volunteer groups, they try to track down all the tips, the father said. Schweiger, with the help of some of his co-workers at New York Telephone, was out yesterday pulling up manhole covers in the area near the Staten Island Developmental Center (SIDC) in Willowbrook searching for some trace of his daughter.

The concerned father has not returned to work since his daughter disappeared, and because of the constant vigil, family members average about five hours of sleep a night.

"How can I go back to work?" a fatigued Schweiger asked. "What am I supposed to do?"

A friend or family member mans the home telephone while other family members are looking for Jennifer.

Police have followed up on reported sightings of the girl in Staten Island and New Jersey, but all have been unconfirmed and Jennifer has been tracked only as far as SIDC. Jennifer was last seen

walking with a man described as about 60 years old, 5 feet 11 inches tall, with a bald spot on the back of his head.

Early in the investigation police said Jennifer's disappearance is similar to cases involving three other missing Island children.

At one point during the search for Jennifer, Essex County police, at the request of local authorities, conducted a full-scale search of an area in Newark. The tip proved unfounded, according to Lt. Louis Fiori of the Crimes Against Property Squad.

"We've done tons of stuff, and we still hold some kind of hope," the lieutenant said yesterday.

Investigators are still waiting for test results on a small amount of blood found in a sink in an SIDC building earlier in the search.

Blood hounds, helicopters, and even infra-red detection equipment have been employed during the hunt.

About 40 volunteers working with a group called the Friends of Jennifer split into three groups yesterday afternoon and scoured the grounds of St. Andrew's, Fairview, and Woodland cemeteries. At night they returned to St. Andrew's Cemetery, and expanded the search to include Moravian and Silver Mount cemeteries, according to Donna Cutugno, a member of the group.

"Right now our groups are looking for evidence that Jennifer may have been there," the volunteer explained.

Members of Richmond County R.E.A.C.T., a citizens band radio group, met yesterday to review the progress of the search and outline areas that may need rechecking.

Patty Lonze also assisted in the search. She is the aunt of Holly Ann Hughes, a seven-year-old Port Richmond girl who disappeared in 1981. Ms. Lonze was incorrectly identified in the Advance yesterday.

"We keep hoping she (Jennifer) is going to show up," Schweiger solemnly said. "We keep hoping for the phone call saying she's on her way..."