

# City police chief joins in search for Jennifer

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ADVANCE STAFF WRITER

City Police Department Chief Robert J. Johnston came to Staten Island Developmental Center (SIDC) in Willowbrook yesterday to confer with investigators searching for signs of Jennifer Schweiger.

"We showed him the areas we are concerned with: SIDC, the Farm Colony and the surrounding areas," said Assistant Chief Samuel Marino, commander of the Island police force. "He made a few suggestions and told us to keep going."

A police helicopter carrying Johnston landed on the SIDC grounds at about 11 a.m. Marino and Lt. Louis Fiori were on the scene to update the chief on the details of the hunt for the 12-year-old girl. Jennifer vanished from the street near her Wardwell Avenue home on July 9, and police were able to track her as far as SIDC before losing all trace.

The girl was last seen walking with a man described as 5 feet 11 inches tall, about 150 pounds, with a bald spot on the back of his head, police said.

Earlier in the search, investigators found a small amount of blood in a sink in a building at SIDC. Results of tests on the blood disclosed yesterday showed it was animal, not human blood, according to Fiori.

A specialized team of officers, which includes members of the Emergency Services Unit as well as investigators from other parts of the city, is carefully combing the SIDC grounds and several other targeted areas, Marino said.

"We will have to spread the search a little bit further," the Island's police commander said yesterday. "We haven't stopped. We are trying to insure that no little crack or crevice has been overlooked."

Investigators pointed out that they had yet to turn up evidence indicating Jennifer had fallen victim to foul play.

Volunteers working with a group called the Friends of Jennifer yesterday began a search of the Farm Colony in Sea View, working their way in from Forest Hill Road, according to Donna Cutugno, a member of the group.

The outpouring of concern for Jennifer has prompted volunteers to come to the Island from communities in Westchester County, New Jersey, Queens and Brooklyn, Mrs. Cutugno said. People wishing to join the search can meet with other volunteers in the Watchogue Road parking lot of

Holy Family R.C. Church in Westerleigh daily at noon and 7 p.m.

Members of the Friends of Jennifer are currently working with the Rev. Henry Gentile, an associate pastor at Holy Family Church, to develop a program to help area residents become more aware of how to safeguard their children, Father Gentile said.

"We are trying to develop something to help children in the future," the priest said. "Since Jennifer is from our parish, we thought that the parish would be a good place to rally around."

Jennifer had made her first communion in the church just a short time before she vanished, according to her father, Ken.

Seminars in the program will include presentations by police, as well as chances for children to be fingerprinted and photographed, Mrs. Cutugno said.

"There is much awareness in the community about having the children looked after," Father Gentile said. "Also, there is a fear by parents around the Jewett Avenue area."

Authorities earlier in the search said they had been questioning an "emotionally disturbed" transient who they placed "somehow in the area" prior to Jennifer's disappearance, as well as those of three other Island children in the past 15 years.

Holy Family parish is acting on Father Gentile's idea to have buttons imprinted with "In Search of Jennifer" made up and given to volunteers. The buttons are intended to keep people aware that the hunt for the missing girl is still on, the priest said.

Volunteers planned to meet in the church today at 11 a.m. to develop plans for the community awareness program.

"We still have hope, much hope, that something will come," Father Gentile said in reference to the search for Jennifer.

Any information concerning Jennifer's whereabouts or fate should be called in to police at a 24-hour hotline number, 447-4168.

Anyone wishing to donate money to the effort to help find Jennifer is asked to send the funds to The Jennifer Schweiger Fund, P.O. Box 961, Staten Island, N.Y., 10314. Money not used to increase a reward currently being offered for information resulting in the return of the girl will be placed into a separate fund and be used as a reward in the event another Island child suffers a similar fate, Mrs. Cutugno said.



ADVANCE PHOTO/TONY CARANNANTE

Assistant Chief Samuel Marino, right, the commander of Staten Island's police force, reviews a map with two other high-ranking police officials.

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