

Drifter, 43, is accused of kidnapping Jennifer

Youngster is still missing



Jennifer Schweiger

By GLENN CHAPMAN
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A 43-year-old homeless man with a history of crimes against children was arrested last night and charged with kidnapping and unlawfully imprisoning Jennifer Schweiger.

Andre Rand, his head down and a glazed look on his face, was handcuffed when Detectives Robert Jensen and Ralph Aquino from the Crimes Against Property Squad brought him into the 120th Precinct stationhouse in St. George shortly after 11 o'clock.

Police said Rand was seen walking with the 12-year-old girl the day she disappeared from the street near her Wardwell Avenue home in Westerleigh. According to investigators, Rand and the girl were last seen together at the Staten Island Developmental Center (SIDC), where the girl's trail ended.

One witness told police the girl was holding Rand's hand and smiling up at him as they walked along, according to authorities. Jennifer has Down's syndrome and congenital heart disease. According to the girl's father, Kenneth Schweiger, Jennifer was extremely warm and trusting.

Volunteers and police using equipment have searched SIDC for some trace of the girl over the past 27 days.

Rand had been living in a makeshift campsite hidden in the woods across from building 27 on the SIDC grounds for a few years, but last night he gave police an address of 320 St. Marks Place, St. George.

The address is that of the Brigh-

ton Heights Reform Church, which houses Project Hospitality, a program designed to help homeless people by providing meals, counseling and shelter during the winter months.

Rand had been interviewed for several hours over a two-day period by detectives who "tried to break him" early in the investigation, but he was not arrested at the time. According to First Deputy Police Commissioner Richard Condon, detectives working on the case have been continually consulting with Staten Island District Attorney William Murphy, who gave the go ahead for last night's arrest.

Condon this morning refused to discuss what prompted the arrest and would not say whether new evidence had surfaced in the case.

"They arrested him based on whatever evidence they had linking him to the child," said Sgt. Raymond O'Donnell, a Police Department spokesman.

Detectives have been interviewing witnesses and following up leads in the case for almost a month. Plainclothes detectives from Manhattan have been prowling the North Shore every night

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