

Program to prevent child abductions highlights day at Cobleskill fair

By JOE MAHER
Gazette Reporter

COBLESKILL — They filed past the booth in Progressland, moms and dads with kids in tow, to get a free head-and-shoulders photograph and fingerprints.

Child abduction is a parent's nightmare, but it happens 75,000 times a year in the United States, according to statistics compiled by the federal government.

"We're also going to events like this to get the message out," said Dave Martin of Albany, a corrections officer at the Coxsackie Correctional Facility.

Rudy the SMART Fox, the mascot for Smart Means Abduction Registration Training, was at the Cobleskill Sunshine Fair Thursday to fingerprint and photograph children.

In the event of an abduction, a recent photo and fingerprints often prove invaluable,

said officials from NYCOPBA, the union that represents corrections officers and other state law enforcement personnel.

The union, the New York Corrections Officers and Police Benevolent Association, runs the SMART program. The group's goal is to present the program to every kindergarten and first grade class in the state.

The three-point message is simple:

- Check with a parent or adult before going anywhere;

- Use the buddy system; and

- If someone makes you feel uncomfortable, leave and tell an adult.

Kids at the fair were amused by Rudy, who Martin said teaches the 90-minute program that NYCOPBA takes to elementary schools.

"The kids interact with Rudy. We're basically trying to get the kids aware of abductions and to know the rules," Martin said.

The reaction from parents was favorable.

"I think it's a wonderful program," said

Tanya Southworth of Worcester, who had her 6-year-old daughter, Brandy, printed and photographed.

"People have to be aware because it's always going on. This way, the kids are protected," Southworth said.

"It's a real good program," Martin added. "It's good, solid training. We hammer home the rules."

Martin said there are a couple other benefits too: Kids learn that they can trust a person wearing a uniform, and the program is also good public relations for the union.

Another Coxsackie corrections officer, Stephen Humphrey of Middleburgh, said the union's SMART campaign will be back at the fair on Sunday.

Humphrey encouraged interested parents to tell their children's teachers about the free program. Anyone who would like to schedule the SMART program for their

school may call the NYCOPBA office in Albany at 427-1551.

Cobleskill fair



MARC SCHULTZ
Gazette
Photographer
William Claus,
a state
corrections
officer, takes a
fingerprint from
Kim Howard of
Springfield, Va.
who was
visiting the
Cobleskill
Sunshine Fair
on Thursday.

