

MYCHIP Goes Digital

By MARK STOUGHT

MANY of you are familiar with the Child Identification Program here in Massachusetts (MYCHIP, for Masonic Youth Child Identification Program), and may or may not know that to date, the program has supplied identification kits free of charge for over 250,000 children all over the Commonwealth. Massachusetts Masons, police officers, and dental professionals all give of their time to make the program a success every time, and make sure that we have qualified people ensuring the quality of the kits. The current kit includes a fingerprint card, DNA cheek swab, tooth print, and questionnaire on videocassette.

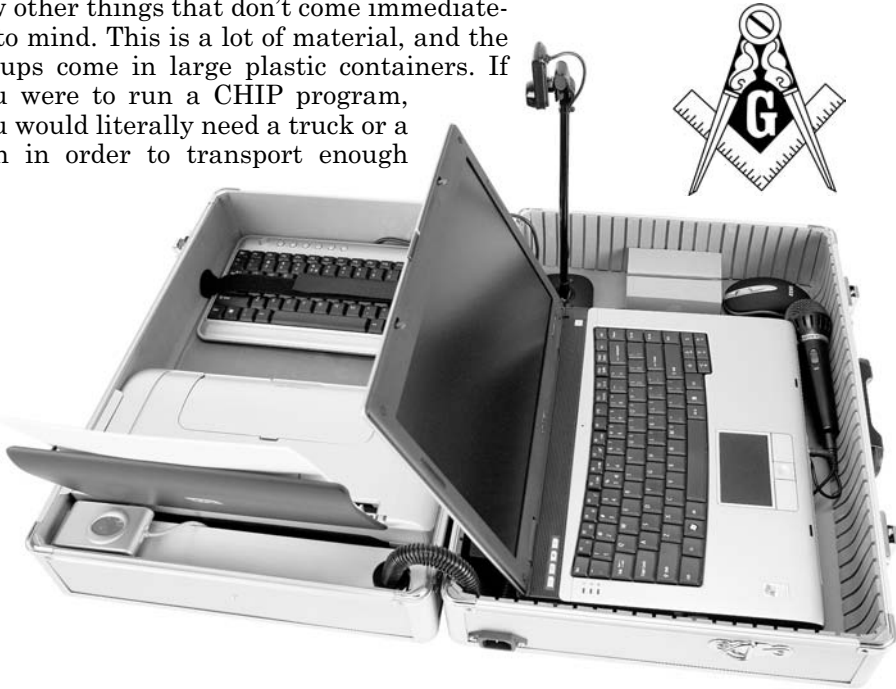
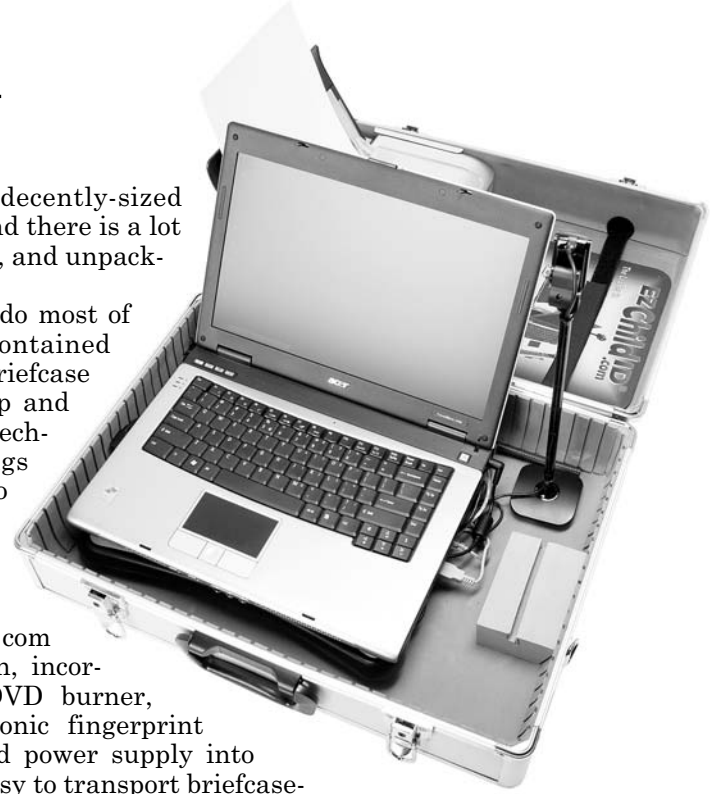
While it is a comprehensive system, technology has progressed quite quickly since the inception of the program in 1988, and recently, the Grand Lodge decided to embrace newer technologies in order to make putting together and executing a CHIP program easier. From a logistical standpoint, the following single-use materials are required for a complete kit: a fingerprint card, a DNA swab, a tooth impression plate, and a videocassette. Other equipment is also necessary to create the total kit: at least one each of a video camera, a tripod, a television, a videocassette rewinder, a hot plate, a fingerprinting setup, plus power strips, extension cords, gaff tape, latex gloves, paper towels, height charts and stands, and probably a few other things that don't come immediately to mind. This is a lot of material, and the setups come in large plastic containers. If you were to run a CHIP program, you would literally need a truck or a van in order to transport enough

equipment run a decently-sized event (3-4 setups), and there is a lot of unloading, loading, and unpacking involved.

What if you could do most of this with a self-contained setup the size of a briefcase that simply opens up and plugs in? Well, as technology makes things smaller, they can do precisely that. The new CHIP setup, called the EZ Child ID System and supplied by EZSystems.com in Redford, Michigan, incorporates a laptop, DVD burner, webcam, and electronic fingerprint scanner, printer, and power supply into an easy to use and easy to transport briefcase-sized case. This eliminates the need for many of the large and bulky items, like the cameras, tripods, height charts and televisions, as well as the fingerprinting supplies. It also takes up less floor space, meaning that less space is needed, and more setups can be used in the same area.

There are also some new features made possible through the computer interface. All the data is entered into a form on the computer. The final form the software generates includes all the pertinent data given by the parents on a pre-interview form, as well as a photo and the child's fingerprints. The form is then printed out and given to the parents. The camera (which can be controlled via the software interface on the computer) will also take video. The video can either be burned onto a DVD or transferred to a flash drive via USB port.

The new system is easy to use, and there is a step-by-step manual in PDF (Adobe Acrobat) format available, which should be available on the Grand Lodge website when the new system is rolled out. There is training required for the new system in order for Lodges to be able to use it, but sessions will be scheduled this summer through the CHIP Coordinators. The new system is a huge step forward in making the CHIP program even more widespread, and will contribute greatly to the safety of children in the Commonwealth.



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