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# Virginia Beach biometrics firm is hired to help with port security

BY CAROLYN  
SHAPIRO  
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VIRGINIA BEACH — Richard A. Johnson believes in the power of his company's biometrics technology to help catch criminals.

Johnson, president of Rileen Innovative Technologies Inc., provided facial-recognition software to help with a child-pornography investigation last year in a state he said he cannot disclose. Investigators used the technology to record the faces and photos of suspects they found during raids. Through the computer database they built, they



**An Ibis RDT3 device verifies Rileen Innovative Technologies President Richard A. Johnson's identity using his fingerprint and facial biometric technology.**

identified and ultimately arrested the members of an active pornography ring — and discovered several missing children in the process.

"I felt good about our technology being used to solve that," said Johnson, who founded Rileen in Virginia Beach in January 1999.

Rileen now has a chance to stop potential trouble closer to home. The Virginia Port Authority has hired the biometrics company to develop a system to identify commercial ship person-

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# Biometrics: Pilot program to track foreign seafarers entering local port

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nel when they come ashore in Hampton Roads. Rileen has received about \$30,000 for a pilot program using fingerprint-scanning and digital-photograph technology at Norfolk International Terminals starting in August and lasting two months.

"They'll learn a little bit about this technology, then we'll refine the process," Johnson said of port officials.

Port police will use a handheld reader with a hole at the top, where seafarers would place their fingers for scanning, and a small camera underneath to shoot their pictures as they get off their ships. Those images appear on a small screen on the device and will be recorded with that person's name, ship, nationality and other information.

A wireless Internet connection sends that data to a computer server. When the mariner returns, port police can check him in with the handheld reader, which pulls the information from the database and confirms with a "true" or "false" that his fingerprint and face match those recorded. Port police can search the database to find anyone who fails to show up.

"If any member of the crew does not come back, we'll know it when the ship sails," said Robert R. Merhige III, the port authority's deputy executive director and head of security, while describing Rileen's pilot program last week to the authority's board of commissioners.

Each year, the marine terminals in Hampton Roads welcome about 2,200 ships – each carrying an average of 22 crew members. With concerns about

find ways to verify the identities of those mariners and to ensure they return to their ships as planned after they go ashore.

Seafarers who arrive at local marine terminals usually carry U.S. visas issued overseas, passports or other identification from the ship line. But with ships and crew coming from so many countries, each with different rules and security standards, port police have no way to know the accuracy of those documents and few ways to keep track of who comes and goes.

Rileen could make the database available to the FBI, immigration officials or other law-enforcement agencies that could benefit from the fingerprints, photos and background collected. Ultimately, Hampton Roads port officials and Johnson hope other U.S. ports will share information in the database to better track and control ship crews.

The local port has considered using a similar system to control access by workers and other visitors at marine terminal gates. It's another way to ensure that people on port property are who they say they are.

Biometrics refers to the use of computers to record and recognize a unique personal characteristic. Rileen specializes in combining two modes of identification: a fingerprint and a face. Other companies have used people's voices, veins, irises, handwriting or even gaits – the way they walk – to make an electronic identification.

Biometrics adds computer enhancement to age-old techniques. Law-enforcement agencies have taken fingerprints and displayed mug shots for years. Rileen and other tech

ties to those traditional methods of recognition.

With Rileen's software, each fingerprint scan and photo is assigned a numerical code. The company's software also specifies the way that code is captured, processed and retrieved.

People do this each time they see a face, send the image to their brains and wait for a signal that they recognize the face. But the human brain and memory make mistakes.

So do computers, but they also add detail, precision and accuracy. Rileen is developing facial-recognition technology that uses three-dimensional images recorded with infrared light, which means it can operate in the dark.

Johnson, 47, grew up in State College, Pa., and joined the Navy. After leaving the service in 1986, he started a software company that developed document-imaging systems.

From there he joined Identix Inc., a Minnesota-based company that makes biometrics devices such as the handheld reader that Rileen uses. Johnson left Identix to form Rileen with his own investment. The company now has about 10 employees and more than \$2 million in sales this year, Johnson said.

He met with Merhige in April to discuss port security. The company has worked mostly with police and corrections departments and has done some projects for immigration officials.

The 2001 terrorist attacks created opportunities for biometrics companies. Now all Rileen has to do is make a name for itself in homeland security, Johnson said.

"We're excited about the port project and where it leads us."

■ *Reach Carolyn Shap-*

terrorism raised after Sept. 11, 2001, the port has struggled to  
companies have developed software that gives distinct proper-  
*iro at 446-2270 or carolyn shapiro@pilotonline.com*