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Project54 more than before

LEE — When two hikers became lost last spring after going down an unmarked trail at Pawtuckaway State Park, it was a bright-green all-terrain vehicle equipped with technology developed by the University of New Hampshire that helped rescuers find the missing pair, according to Nottingham Police Officer Ross Oberlin.

"They were off the beaten path. We fired up the machine and they were found in 15 minutes," Oberlin said.

The ATV Oberline used to find the hikers was equipped with technology created as part of UNH's Project54, an ongoing research program that integrates all the electronic devices in a police cruiser or rescue vehicle into a single, voice-activated computer interface.

Project54 researchers, Sen. Judd Gregg, local law enforcement officers and UNH administrators were in Lee on Tuesday morning for a showcase of the latest vehicles equipped with Project54 technology. Project54 researchers also announced a new partnership with New Hampshire Public Television to use the television station's excess digital bandwidth to transmit data to police and rescue vehicles.
J. Bonnie Newman, interim UNH president, said the technology developed by Project54 will improve public safety and communication between law enforcement and emergency personnel.

"Though the technology is complex, it addresses a basic, important need," Newman said.

Researchers with Project54 are now studying the possibility of using excess space from NHPTV's digital broadcasts to transmit data files, like pictures or video, from State Police dispatchers to Project54-equipped cruisers.

Project54 began in 1999. Now, police and rescue vehicles across the state are equipped with the computer system, which allows police and firefighters to make radio calls, conduct license plate checks or access emergency bulletins using a voice-activated computer system. The initiative has moved beyond the state. Maryland State Police and police departments in Colorado, North Dakota and Minnesota are using Project54-equipped cruisers.
At the event in Lee on Tuesday, a fire command vehicle from Exeter, a police motorcycle from Greenland and ATVs from Nottingham and Berlin, all sporting Project54 computers, were on display.

"The ability to get information quickly cannot be understated," said Gregg, who has helped secure Department of Justice funding for Project54 since its inception. "Project54 is a hands-on tool that gives the law enforcement community a better ability to protect us."

Gregg applauded the collaborative effort between university researchers and the New Hampshire State Police that helped jumpstart Project54.

"This has tremendous implications. I think you're going to see us as a state contribute dramatically to making this country safer," he said.