

## THE INNOVATORS

Jiobit CEO John Renaldi at Maggie Daley Park, where he lost track of his son a couple of years ago.



SEYMOUR YERMIANIAN

# How a scare led to a child-tracking device

This dad invented a system that uses more than GPS to keep tabs on children

BY HOWARD WOLINSKY

John Renaldi experienced every parent's nightmare a couple of years ago when he lost track of his 6-year-old son, Ethan, in Maggie Daley Park. He found him after a half-hour of searching. "Ethan actually wasn't scared at all because he was just playing around and having fun and said that he saw me from afar," he recalls.

Renaldi came up with something that day: the idea for a better kid tracker. With \$4.6 million in backing, he's marketing it today: **Jiobit**, a device about the size and weight of a double-A battery that can be snapped on a child's belt, shoelaces or clothing. It gathers data from cellular, Bluetooth and Wi-Fi networks plus GPS altimeter and motion sensors to locate a child and relay their real-time whereabouts to an app on a caregiver's smartphone.

The Jiobit also keeps track of a child's usual routes and will send an alarm if the child wanders off, and its rechargeable battery lasts at least a week. The base price for the system is \$179 plus \$10 monthly for a tracking subscription.

Jiobit, which launched as a startup in late 2015 with Renaldi as CEO, isn't the first child tracker on the market. But Renaldi says the others use only GPS, which doesn't work inside buildings. In addition, he says, the others have battery lives of just a day or two and often are much heavier.

Renaldi, 38, grew up in south suburban Frankfort, the son of a grade-school teacher mom and an IBM engineer dad. He studied marketing at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign but learned coding on the side. After graduating in 2001, he was a consultant at Deloitte with clients in telecommunications and retailing. He joined Motorola in 2004 and was promoted to run its Moto Maker program, which enabled consumers to design their own smartphones. He left Motorola Mobility in 2015 after Google sold the company to Lenovo and his

project was "deprioritized."

Jiobit's funders include Math Venture Partners and Inflection Equity, both in Chicago, plus executives from Facebook and Motorola. The startup has 16 employees split between River North and Menlo Park, Calif. Renaldi expects headcount to grow to 25 by spring. He won't disclose revenue but says he sold out his first batch of devices in July. He's introducing a tracker for pets this fall.

"John is obsessed with understanding customer needs and can rally great technical talent around solving real user problems," says Lior Ron, a senior director at Uber who was Renaldi's boss at Motorola Mobility and is a Jiobit investor. "Innovation is that careful balance of product, business, technology and people that is tricky to achieve. I've seen John balance that successfully again and again."

Renaldi and his wife, Theresa, live in Park Ridge with Ethan, now 8, and their daughter, Ava, 6. And yes, he's used the Jiobit with his kids, tracking them last spring, for instance, on a family vacation in Disney World.