

High-tech call system helps find girl

Written by MARK JAEGER

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Reverse-911 alert activated when panicked mother tells police her 6-year-old daughter was missing

A high-tech communication system helped bring a happy ending last week in the case of a missing 6-year-old child.

According to Saukville Police Chief Jeff Goetz, the incident began when the Saukville Police Department's dispatch center received a call at 1:30 p.m. Thursday from a frantic mother.

Angie Kapitz told authorities her daughter Gracie was missing from an apartment building in the 400 block of Chiswell Street.

"This was a woman who never let her daughter out of her sight, and she was beside herself because she hadn't seen her daughter for about 20 minutes," Goetz said in describing the incident later in the day to the village's Public Safety Committee.

Little Gracie's bike was found in some bushes across the parking lot from where the family lives.

The police department called the Ozaukee County Sheriff's Department to assist in the search. Goetz said 60 residences were visited as officers went door to door seeking any details about the missing girl.

He said the sheriff's department then deployed its MyState USA reverse-911 alert system, which made automated phones to 1,200 phones within a one-mile radius of where the little girl was last seen.

The automated calls went out at 2:36 p.m.

"You could tell the system was working, because people almost immediately started driving around looking for her. I can't tell you how many people stopped our squad cars and asked if we had found the little girl yet," Goetz said.

One of those automated calls went to the home of Jason and Brigid Stucky in the 900 block of Colonial Parkway, where the phone was answered by their 12-year-old daughter Madelyn.

"I listened to the description they gave on the phone, and noticed the bright green shirt and pony tail matched the little girl my sister was paying with in the backyard. That's when I called 911," Madelyn Stucky said.

A squad car came to make sure Gracie was safe. Another squad came a short while later with her mother.

"It was pretty exciting. I have never been part of anything like that before," the 12-year-old said.

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"I thank God it worked out," Goetz said.

"Kudos have to go out to the citizens of Saukville who were so willing to stop what they were doing and help find that little girl."

The sheriff's department has had the reverse-911 system in place for about five years. It allows authorities to determine what area they want covered by blanket phone calls, which are automatically made.

Goetz said the alert costs about 16 cents a call.

"I'll gladly pay 10 times that amount for an outcome like this," the chief said.

Angie Kapitz said it turned out her daughter had been coaxed into taking a walk by a young friend to the home of the friend's grandmother without telling anyone.

They eventually found a classmate from Saukville Elementary School playing at the Stucky home.

"She had never done anything like this before," Kapitz said. "If you have children, having them disappear near a busy road is your worst nightmare."

She said Gracie got a good talking to following the incident.

"I am an old-school mom, and told her she is grounded for the summer," Kapitz said.