



April 28, 2006

Dear News Director/Editor:

As CEO, I am pleased to announce that Gabriel's Gifts, a Houston area support and education group focusing on missing children, will now be known as the Texas Center for the Missing (effective May 1st). The name change will be announced during our 5th annual fund raising brunch honoring the Houston Police Department's Missing Person Division for their extraordinary commitment to the missing and their families.

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Gabriel's Gifts, founded in 2000 by Houston business executive Doreen Wise, was named in memory of her son Gabriel after his four-month disappearance and tragic loss. The Texas Center for the Missing has a simple goal: to keep children and adults safe. We concentrate our efforts on education and support programs for victim families and law enforcement agencies as well as focusing on prevention education aimed at the general public. We coordinate the Southeast Texas Search and Rescue Alliance, a consortium of volunteer groups trained in search and rescue. We also administer the Houston Regional Amber Plan.

The Center's advocacy and support services for victims and their families include guidance in reporting and finding a missing or abducted child, guidance in finding a runaway child, resource databases for abduction survivors and their families, and liaison support between families and law enforcement including case management, reunification, and information and referral services.

Please keep the attached packet of information on-hand should you ever need information or referral regarding the Amber Alert or missing persons. The packet includes a media release regarding the April 30th Champagne Brunch to be released on May 1, 2006; a letter from our founder; relevant statistics pertaining to missing persons; and an overview of the programs and services offered by the Texas Center for the Missing.

To schedule an interview or speaker, please contact me at 713.314.3644 or balberts@gabrielsgifts.org.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Beth Alberts
CEO

Attachments

*Formerly known as Gabriel's Gifts Missing Children's Organization,
We offer help, and hope, to the missing and their families.*



For Immediate Release

HOUSTON MISSING CHILDREN'S ORGANIZATION CHANGES NAME TO THE TEXAS CENTER FOR THE MISSING

Houston....(May 1, 2006) Gabriel's Gifts, a Houston area support and education group focusing on missing children, announced that it will now be known as the **Texas Center for the Missing**. The name change was announced during the group's 5th annual fund raising brunch, sponsored by Vinson & Elkins LLP, which honored the Houston Police Department's Missing Person Division for their extraordinary commitment to the missing and their families.

Gabriel's Gifts, founded in 2000 by Houston business executive Doreen Wise, was named in memory of her son Gabriel after his four-month disappearance and tragic loss. "This organization provides a vast array of crucial services in a large geographic area," commented Wise. "This new name more closely reflects our mission of awareness, prevention and education while also providing help and hope to the missing and their families."

For the 12 months ending December 31, 2005, the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) recorded over 800,000 missing persons; more than 650,000 of these were juveniles. In 2005, the Texas Department of Public Safety recorded 62,021 missing child reports, 7,704 cases remained open at the end of 2005. Last year, Harris County had 8,956 missing child cases filed and there were 11,648 missing child cases in the 13-county Houston region.

The Second National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway Children (NISMAART-2) research conducted in 1999 reports:

- 1.3 million Children missing each year
- 797,500 reported to the police
- 58,200 children abducted by non-family members
- 115 stereotypical kidnappings – 56% recovered, 40% killed and 4% remain missing
- Nearly half of all child victims of stereotypical kidnappings and non-family abductions were sexually assaulted by the perpetrator
- Highest risk: 12 – 14 year olds make up 40% of these abductions but represent only 16% of the population.
- 69% are female, 31% are male
- Adductor's motives vary, but the primary motive is sexual assault.

More...

Beth Alberts, CEO of Texas Center for the Missing, stated, "Our goal is to keep children and adults safe, we continue to concentrate our efforts on education and support programs for victim families and law enforcement agencies as well as focusing on prevention education aimed at the general public." In addition, the Center coordinates the Southeast Texas Search and Rescue Alliance, a consortium of volunteer groups trained in search and rescue. Additionally, Alberts serves as the Director of the Houston Regional Amber Plan.

The Center's law enforcement support and training includes 24-hour a day, 7-day a week Amber Alert activation support, access to search and rescue services for missing children and endangered elderly, training in missing persons resources and search activities at the local, state and national level and case management and liaison activities between law enforcement agencies and victims' families.

In 2005, the organization trained over 900 law officers (210 regionally, 245 in other Texas locales and 472 nationally) during 28 training sessions. They assisted in issuing Amber Alerts for 11 children, 10 of whom were safely recovered and worked with 33 cases which represented 7 adults and 27 children.

The Center's advocacy and support services for victims and their families include guidance in reporting and finding a missing or abducted child, guidance in finding a runaway child, resource databases for abduction survivors and their families, and liaison support between families and law enforcement including case management, reunification, information and referral services.

The keystone of the Center's services is prevention. In 2005, the organization distributed close to 7,000 Safe Child Information kits, 13,000 Child ID Kits/Cards, and staffed 80 Child ID booths. The Center's volunteers provide Child ID kits and public awareness/prevention programs for churches, schools, civic organizations or any other group or organization seeking information on this critical national issue.

For more information, contact Ms. Alberts at 713.314.3644 or Associate Director, Melissa Hulin, at 713.314.3673. The website is: www.texascenterforthemissing.org.

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Texas Center for the Missing

Offering help, and hope, to the missing and their families.

6330 West Loop South, Suite 105 ♦ Bellaire, TX 77401

(p) 713.314.3644 ♦ (f) 713.522.7386 ♦ www.thetexascenter.org

Our Vision:

- To be a **Gathering Place** where those delivering services to the families of the missing find peers, share knowledge, and form collaborations.
- To be a **Clearinghouse** of knowledge and tools for those who work with the families of those who are missing
- To be an **Incubator** of new training, technology, methods, organizations, programs, and projects.
- To be a **Rainmaker** mobilizing new resources to expand the capacity of organizations to find missing persons and support their families.
- To be a **Think Tank** scanning the horizon for new advancements, analyzing their potential applications, and communicating these to members and the public.

THE PROBLEM

In the State of Texas in 2005, there were 834,536 missing person reports with 7,704 remaining open at the end of the year. Of reports filed, 62,021, or 85%, were children – more than 160 per day! In addition, the increasing number of Alzheimer's patients is a growing percentage of the missing and it is imperative to develop programs to address the specific needs of prevention and search efforts for this unique population.

Missing Persons professionals and volunteers alike, often lack access to the most basic training and resources to enable them to do their jobs well. These service providers and the ones they serve—the victims, families and the community—all suffer. Resources *are* available but they are not well coordinated nor are they easily accessible. Those needing information, education and training *must* be made aware of the resources available and educated in how to access them.

THE SOLUTION

Our primary mission in creating the Texas Center for the Missing is to reduce the duplication of effort while circumventing the arduous task of bringing essential resources to bear on critical missing person cases in a fast, effective manner. Secondly, we will identify gaps in service and locate, or create, appropriate programs to address existing and emerging needs.

The Texas Center for the Missing will be housed in Houston, Texas, and provide statewide access as a one-stop shop for information, education, and training for law enforcement, search volunteers, missing person organizations, victims and victims' advocates, and the general public.

Populations Served:

During the first year, we expect to serve 100 agencies and organizations and 20,000 people. Populations will include:

- Law Enforcement: public safety agencies and officers
- Public and Non-Profit Organizations: missing person organizations, victim's advocacy organizations, search and rescue teams; and

- *The Public*: parents and families, media representatives, concerned citizens, scholars, etc. services

Prevention and Safety Education Programs

- Safety education and information for caregivers of the elderly, mentally challenged and children
- Education in what to do if someone is missing
- Abduction resistance and Internet safety programs for children and parents
- Runaway prevention education for children and their families

Information and Referral

Information about:

- Missing persons, search resources and current missing person cases
- The local, state and federal missing person laws, parental abduction laws and international missing person laws
- Myths vs. facts about missing persons, child abductions, runaways and Amber Alerts
- The most up-to-date missing person statistics

Referral for:

- Victim services
- Law enforcement support
- Search and rescue efforts and resources

Community Outreach

- Staffing booths at schools, health fairs and distributing child safety information and child identification kits.
- Assistance and instruction to start a local:
 - Missing Child/Person Program
 - Search and Rescue Coalition
 - Victim Support Program or Trauma Intervention Service
 - Amber Alert Program
- Guidelines to establish networks and partnerships with law enforcement, search and rescue teams and victim service organizations
- Policy Watch: reviewing legislation that affects non-profits, volunteers, search and rescue volunteers, law enforcement, sex offenders or missing persons

Training Programs

- **Law Enforcement** TCLEOSE Certified Training Classes in:
 - Amber Alerts on the regional, state and national levels
 - Missing Children: The Sex Offender Connection
 - Child Abduction/Child Homicide
 - Utilizing Volunteer Search Resources
 - Utilizing the Incident Command System for Multi-Disciplinary, Multi-Jurisdictional Missing Person Search
 - Missing Person Investigation
- National Association of **Search and Rescue** certified classes in:
 - Introduction to Search and Rescue
 - Managing the Lost Person Incident
 - Fundamentals of Search and Rescue
 - Advanced Search and Rescue
 - K-9 Search Training
- For **Missing Person Organizations**:
 - Support in how to operate a non-profit missing person organization
 - Law enforcement liaison best practices and search volunteer management
 - Resource development and victims' advocacy

Case Management/Casework

- Victim support and advocacy during and after the search via meetings and phone/email communications with victims and families to ensure needs are met
- Consultations for law enforcement, volunteers and other agencies to assist them in serving the needs of their clients
- Crime Victims' Compensation Advocacy





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A first-of-its-kind study of computer files at the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children conducted by Scripps Howard News Service has found that dozens of police departments across the nation failed to report at least 4,498 runaway, lost and abducted children in apparent violation of the National Child Search Assistance Act passed by Congress in 1990.”

Thomas Hargrove, Scripps Howard News Service, May 10, 2005.

“Searches must be well coordinated, controlled, and conducted [preferably] by personnel trained in search and rescue techniques. Volunteers must be closely supervised and their actions documented.”

FBI Child Abduction Response Plan.

Missing Children: *The Problem*

- For the year ending December 31, 2005, of the 834,536 missing persons reports entered into NCIC, 664,659 missing persons are juveniles.
- In Texas alone, the Texas Department of Public Safety Missing Persons Clearinghouse took in 62,021 missing child reports in 2005 with 4,891 cases remaining open on December 31, 2005.
- In 2005, there were 8,905 missing child cases filed in Harris County and 11,648 in the 13-county Houston Region.

The Amber Alert

- The Amber Alert is named for Amber Hagerman who was abducted near her grandparents' Arlington, Texas, home in January of 1996. Her body was located 4 days later.
- The Association of Radio Managers spearheaded the effort and implemented the first Amber Alert in the Dallas area in July 1997.
- There are currently 115 amber plans (51 statewide, 27 regional and 37 local) in the U.S. credited with recovering 256 children.

Houston Regional Amber Plan (HRAP)

- The Houston Regional Amber Plan began December 7, 2000.
- HRAP is a web-based, interactive system designed to provide broad information distribution to the public to assist in the safe recovery of abducted children.
- Houston has issued 53 Amber Alerts for 56 children, 50 of whom were located alive and returned to their families, three were located deceased and three are still missing (Laura Ayala, 3/10/02; Jesus Martinez-Alvarado, 10/21/04; and Kendrick Jackson, 4/7/06).
- www.amber-plan.net

Amber Plan Activation Criteria:

- The child is 17 years of age or younger (meaning the child is a minor under Texas state law).
- The law enforcement agency believes the child has been abducted.
- The law enforcement agency believes the missing child is in immediate danger of serious bodily harm or death.
- The law enforcement agency has conducted an investigation that has either verified the abduction or eliminated alternative explanations for the child's disappearance.
- Sufficient information is available to distribute to the public that could assist in locating the abducted child, suspect, or the vehicle used in the abduction.



A Note from Gabriel's Mom

Almost six years ago my husband and I received the call that every parent dreads: 17-year-old Gabe was missing from his school, and no one could find him...

In the following four months we searched for Gabe. We kept thinking there *had* to be resources for parents to access during the worst, most fearful moments of their lives. We found there were precious few. It became evident very early that we were on our own.

The police had virtually no resources for the search and rescue of a missing child. They wanted to help, but had too many cases and too little help.

Somehow a missing 17 year old wasn't newsworthy! But once we finally convinced the press to cover the story, a few search teams came forward to help. But there were *no* coordinated efforts whatsoever.

We bought billboard space, worked with teams searching by water, air, and land while others rappelled down cliffs. We hired a string of investigators of varying degrees of skill. We found absolutely *no one* who could advise us how to proceed – all they said was: "go home, he will turn up." I don't know many parents who would think that advice was responsive in the least!

Finally, we found our child's body and our lives changed forever.

It is naïve to think that life ever returns to normal. However, we did have choices about how things could be improved going forward. We resolved that no other parent should have to endure the catastrophic worry of a lost child alone and without resources. And that is how the Texas Center for the Missing came to be.

In five years we have built collaborative relationships between willing, skilled search teams and law enforcement. Where once they were skeptical of each other, they now partner. This benefits families and children.

The Texas Center for the Missing administers the nation's strongest chapter of Amber Alert. Our training model is nationally recognized. This past year, Amber Alert has resulted in 15 found children out of 16 missing in our 13-county region! Concerned citizens are passionate about helping these families and we are honored by our association.

The Texas Center for the Missing provides free child identification for parents should the child ever be lost. We do extensive community education of children to help them be aware, to prevent their being abducted, and to know what to do if they are. There is *much more* we need to do and we need your help!

You are invited to help the Texas Center for the Missing in our mission. I would be grateful for your participation and your support. Thank you.

Doreen James Wise