

From the Desk of Sheriff Bob Gualtieri

The Alzheimer's Association estimates that there are 450,000 people in Florida with Alzheimer's disease.

In 2016, Florida issued 245 statewide Silver Alerts, called when a senior suffering from irreversible deterioration of intellectual faculties, like Alzheimer's, goes missing while driving a motor vehicle – and that number doesn't include local alerts for cases not involving vehicles.

In 2010 (the most recent statistics available), there were 94,909 cases of endangered or disabled missing persons, according to the National Crime Information Center's (NCIC) Active/Expired Missing and Unidentified Analysis Reports.

A lot goes into locating a missing senior citizen. An average case can involve multiple law enforcement and public safety agencies, several outside community resources, hundreds of officers, countless man-hours, and sometimes thousands of dollars – not to mention the extreme emotional distress on family members and caregivers.

To ease this strain on resources and loved ones and protect our most vulnerable citizens, the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office has partnered with SafetyNET Tracking Systems.

Citizens enrolled in the SafetyNET program are equipped with a personalized tracking wristband. If the citizen goes missing, the caregiver contacts SafetyNET and law enforcement, who can log into the tracking portal, obtain critical information about the citizen and track the radio frequency signal emitted from the wristband to locate him/her.

The SafetyNET program, which can also be used for people with autism or similar special needs who have a tendency to wander, boasts an average rescue time of less than 30 minutes.

The lightweight, waterproof wristbands can be purchased or leased and are available with a variety of strap choices and optional add-ons like alarms, replacement batteries, transmitter testers, etc.

To qualify, the person receiving the band must live in a SafetyNET coverage zone, be diagnosed with a cognitive impairment, not drive a motor vehicle or take public transportation without supervision, and be under constant supervision and monitoring.

The SafetyNET website, www.safetynettracking.com, provides caregivers a host of resources ranging from program fact sheets and testimonials to FAQs and a blog that covers relevant topics and stories in the news.

Although SafetyNET is new to Pinellas County, the program's concept is not. For years, the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office has sponsored Project Lifesaver, which offered the same style of wristband-tracking system. Although Project Lifesaver members must re-register with SafetyNET, the agency's transition will save community money, time, and resources.

For more information and to enroll, visit www.safetynettracking.com or call 877-434-6384.