

Updated: Another Alzheimer's Sufferer Goes Missing, Later Found

Don Pandel, 80, disappeared over the weekend and was found days later nearly 160 miles from his home in Port Richey, Fla.

Pandel, who is diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, left his home on Sunday morning to get breakfast, but got disoriented and was subsequently found on Wednesday in Port St. Lucie, Fla.

During the search for Mr. Pandel, a family member was quoted as saying, "Right now we've notified everyone we can...My wife is on her way out to make some fliers."

In April, Gus introduced legislation that would have helped in the search for Mr. Pandel.

The Silver Alert Grant Program Act (H.R. 5898) would provide U.S. states and territories with the means to implement an Amber Alert-like notification system to help families, friends and authorities locate missing older adults suffering from dementia-related illnesses.

On Wednesday, in an editorial, Florida Today wrote about Gus's Silver Alert Bill as a way to help Florida and other states with large elderly populations deal with the cost of setting up their own notifications systems...

Talk about a bill to create a Silver Alert system (in Florida) fizzled during the legislative session this year, another victim of a lousy fiscal climate that made lawmakers shy away from any new proposals that could cost money.

That's too bad, because Silver Alert programs carry a minimal price tag, since they can be piggybacked on the Amber Alerts systems.

North Carolina's senior alert runs on no new money, according to Stateline.org., which researches public policy issues.

That's why groundwork should be laid now to start the program in Florida next year, even if the budget picture remains bleak.

Legislation before Congress could offer help.

...The measure sets up a \$5.6 million federal grant program with seed dollars of at least \$100,000 for state-administered notification systems.

Bilirakis' bill was spurred by the March death of Mary Gill Zelter, 86, of Largo, who left her assisted living facility and drowned after apparently becoming confused.

Her sad case underscores the sense behind senior alerts, which can prevent needless deaths.

And why the Sunshine State should sign on to Silver Alerts.

They're a public safety tool Florida, which promotes itself as an elder-haven, should have in its toolbox.

In just under a month, H.R. 5898 has received wide bipartisan support with 54 co-sponsors ranging from all parts of the political spectrum. Gus plans to hold a press conference in his district on June 3rd to further highlight this issue.

Update: Friday, May 23,2008 at 9:49 a.m.

According to a final count at the end of the legislative week, the number of bipartisan co-sponsorships totaled 61, most of them acquired through Gus's personal efforts on the House floor to educate members on the issue.