

Lakeland Ledger: State Needs Silver Alert

Today's Lakeland Ledger has an editorial making the case for the need to have a Silver Alert notification system in Florida.

Last week, Gus brought together state legislators and local elderly and Alzheimer's advocates to discuss the urgent need for a Florida Silver Alert system. During the event, Florida Reps. Kurt Kelly (R-Ocala) and Tom Anderson (R-Dunedin) announced plans to introduce a bill in the state legislature during the State's next legislative session.

From The Ledger...

Florida has a higher number of residents older than 65 than any other state in the nation. The Alzheimer's Foundation of America said more than 300,000 of those residents have Alzheimer's disease, and about six in 10 will wander away and become disoriented.

The association said of those who wander, most are found within five miles of their home. Of those not found within 24 hours, half will be seriously injured or die.

...It's working in eight states, and has resulted in the safe return of a majority of those reported. When 83-year-old Helen Long left her North Carolina home without notice last January, her daughter called state police, who sent out a description of her truck on the state's Silver Alert system. Six hours later, a UPS driver spotted the truck and called for help. Long was returned to her home unharmed.

"The beauty of Silver Alert is that it's something people can remember," Carlos Higgins of the National Silver-Haired Congress, told Stateline.org. "If you just say 'Silver Alert,' people know there's a confused elderly person out there who needs help."

Bilirakis Silver Alert Bill Gets a Mention

The editorial mentions a bill introduced by Gus in Congress, the Silver Alert Grant Program Act (H.R. 5898), and the impetus behind his legislation.

...In April, U.S. Rep. Gus Bilirakis, R-Palm Harbor, introduced a bill to create a \$5.6 million federal grant program to help states establish a Silver Alert system.

Bilirakis filed the bill after Mary Zelter, 86, signed herself out of an assisted-living facility in Largo in late February and went off to the store in her white Sebring convertible. She didn't return. Seven days later, her body and the car were found in the Intracoastal Waterway off Clearwater Beach, about eight miles from her home. Zelter apparently mistook a boat ramp for the continuation of a road and drove her car into the water.

"This tragedy unfortunately highlights the very real problem of older residents, many of whom suffer from diseases which leave them easily confused and disoriented, wandering away from their homes or caregiving facilities and meeting harm because family, friends and authorities could not find them in time," Bilirakis said.

Silver Alert costs little and could piggyback on the Amber Alert system. The Legislature should take quick action to get it up and running.