

THE AMBER ADVOCATE

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Your story ideas and pictures are welcome.

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PROFILE: PHIL KEITH

A DECADE DEDICATED TO BRINGING ABDUCTED CHILDREN HOME

Phil Keith had just retired in 2004 as the police chief of Knoxville, Tennessee when he was given a monumental task: make sure every state, territory and the District of Columbia has a consistent and effective AMBER Alert program within two years. Many states and communities had a child abduction alert system but the programs varied in size, criteria and capability.

“One of the driving tenants of the development of the AMBER Alert system was to not decide what level of participation there would be but to make the network

who knew what did and did not work. They reached their goal in 18 months and wanted to do more.

“It was very clear the U.S. Department of Justice AMBER Alert Initiative was more than highway signs and messaging,” said Keith. “The program had to create a voluntary seamless network of AMBER Alert Plans designed to rescue and recover missing, endangered and abducted children.”

The team used best practices on investigations, searches, policies and



seamless and let the local, tribal, regional and state governments make the most informed decision best meeting their needs,” said Keith. “This strategy is still in place today.”

Keith put together a small team of professionals who understood teamwork, a strong work ethic and a “relentless sense of urgency to help recover missing children.” The team listened to law enforcement officers

technologies to help good AMBER Alert programs become better. Team members invited abduction victims and their families to learn about the strengths and shortfalls they witnessed firsthand. They discovered and developed new ways to recover children like the Child Abduction Response Team, Endangered Missing Advisory, AMBER Alert in Indian Country Initiative and the Southern Border Initiative and using social media,

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PROFILE: PHIL KEITH

A DECADE DEDICATED TO BRINGING ABDUCTED CHILDREN HOME

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including sending AMBER Alerts through the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children's secondary distribution program.

"This is not to say there were not 'bumps in the road,' bruised feelings or some unintentional temporary derailments, but the bottom line was the focus on protecting children," said Keith. "We pushed the envelope at times to gain acceptance, secure sincere team efforts at all levels of government and were very careful to be inclusive rather than exclusive."

Funding for training has always been difficult to obtain on a federal, state and local level. Keith had to find ways to teach more people with less money. Instead of bringing hundreds of people to be trained by a few experts, he began sending the experts to train hundreds of AMBER Alert partners where they worked.

More than 18,700 people have also been trained through eLearning courses.

Now nearly a decade later, Keith has retired from the AMBER Alert Program. Jim Walters, who has been involved with the AMBER Alert Program since its beginnings, has assumed the position as Director of the AMBER Alert Training and Technical Assistance Program. He credits the team for bringing the AMBER Alert Program to its current level and he believes teamwork will be essential to keep the momentum going.

"We have already seen 'bad guys' let children go once they hear AMBER Alerts have been issued, so we are headed in the right direction," concluded Keith. "However, we have to be ever vigilant in our efforts as there are some really evil people in the world who bring great risk and harm to our children." ☺



"This is not to say there were not 'bumps in the road,' bruised feelings or some unintentional temporary derailments, but the bottom line was the focus on protecting children."

KEITH'S PARTING THOUGHTS ON:

CHILD ABDUCTION RESPONSE TEAM (CART)

These teams are built from the bottom up in most communities and represent the true intent of state, local and tribal communities to be prepared to respond to episodes of missing, endangered or abducted children. This model program should remain the flagship initiative of the U.S. Department of Justice and be expanded into as many communities as possible.



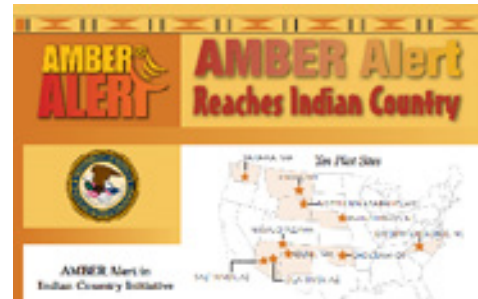
ENDANGERED MISSING ADVISORY

The common recurring question about AMBER Alerts was “what to do if my child does not meet the criteria.” The Endangered Missing Advisory addresses the gap for persons over the age of 17, special needs persons and addresses a population neglected by most everyone, the “endangered missing and runaways.” Today over 43 states and a number of local communities have adopted a form of the Endangered Missing Advisory Program.



AMBER ALERT IN INDIAN COUNTRY

This initiative was designed to meet the culturally sensitive needs of life in tribal communities and the unique challenges tribal members face every day. We learned early on not to layer another program on the tribes, but rather utilize existing programs and efforts to compliment the work achieved and give AMBER Alert a true meaning of creating greater capacity and skills to respond to children in crisis among tribal communities.



THE SOUTHERN BORDER INITIATIVE

Our partners on both sides of the border demonstrated their dedication and resolve to make a difference in missing children and after only 18 months we had “Alerta AMBER” throughout Mexico. Many of the officials supported the Alerta AMBER, even though there is a potential grave consequence by organized criminal enterprises not interested in the welfare of children and were most likely involved in the trafficking of children for commercial sexual exploitation.



AMBER ALERTS IN SOCIAL MEDIA

Technology has been a great tool to advance the AMBER Alert messaging. In the coming years use of the social media will become a more localized effort as it should be, as the local communities know best what is needed and the urgency in getting “other eyes” looking for missing children.



ON THE FRONT LINES:

SOCIAL MEDIA PLAYS CRITICAL ROLE IN QUEBEC AMBER ALERT



Quebec AMBER Alert suspect caught on surveillance footage

A woman wearing a nurse's uniform walked into a hospital in Trois-Rivières, Quebec on May 26, 2014 and left with a baby who was born 16 hours earlier. The woman was not the mother of little Victoria McMahon and she drove away with the newborn in a red car with a sign that said "Baby on Board."

The hospital's security guards found a picture of the woman and staff members and patients provided details to municipal police about the suspect and her vehicle. Quebec AMBER Alert Coordinator Jean-Charles Benoit was contacted and he quickly determined the situation met the criteria for an AMBER Alert.



Quebec Provincial Police Sergeant Martine Asselin

Quebec Provincial Police Sergeant Martine Asselin was at home when she got the call that an AMBER Alert was about to be issued. Asselin is the public information officer for her agency and she knew she needed to be ready to answer questions for the media. "The biggest challenge is to get the alert out as quickly as possible," said Asselin. "We have

to be fast but the information has to be good."

This was the 10th AMBER Alert issued by the Quebec Provincial Police and every child from previous alerts had been recovered safely. Flyers with information about the latest alert went out to law enforcement, media, social media, transportation and other AMBER Alert partners.

"You have to be ready before it happens," said Asselin. "You have to have a protocol so everyone knows what to do."

They were trained and ready but everyone knew what was at stake. "Everyone is touched by this type of call," said Asselin. "It is their job but no one is immune to the emotions of a child needing help."

Charlène Plant and three friends saw the alert on Facebook and immediately joined the search. They recognized the suspect as a former neighbor and drove to her apartment and saw her car parked outside. "We just wanted to do something for the night, so we went out to find the car," Plant told a reporter.

They called the police and 50 minutes after the alert went out the baby was recovered safely and the suspect was in custody.

Not surprisingly, Victoria's mother, Mélissa McMahon, thanked everyone on Facebook. "The photo saved our daughter! In less than an hour, the photo was everywhere. You were more than thousands of people who shared the photo of this woman on social media. Know that it was this that saved her, our little Victoria. Every click, every share made the difference."

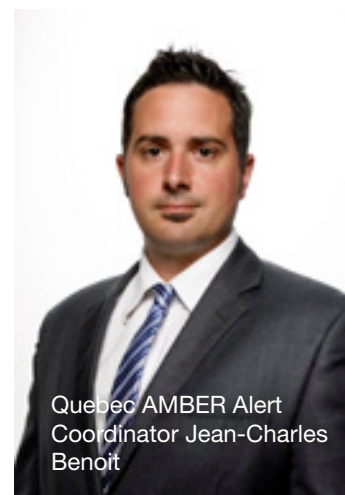
"The child was recovered safely and returned to her waiting parents within less than three hours," noted Canada AMBER Alert Coordinator Nancy Martin. "It was a proud moment for all involved."

Everyone involved in the Quebec AMBER Alert Program is also a big believer about the impact of social media. "Facebook was the reason this AMBER Alert was a success," said Asselin. "The fact that it went out on social media demonstrates that social media can

really help in an AMBER Alert."

The use of social media and the fact it was the first time in recent memory that a child had been abducted from a hospital in Canada drew international attention to the case and the AMBER Alert system. "It was like a movie scenario," said Asselin. "We were very proud of the work by the police and we worked together as a team to use new tools to find a child."

Despite the success, Asselin said her agency will still look for new ways to help find abducted children. "We always can improve," she said. "We need to be sure we are on track and we need to make sure everyone is prepared."



Quebec AMBER Alert
Coordinator Jean-Charles
Benoit



"We just wanted to do something for the night, so we went out to find the car."

Charlène Plant and Mélizanne Bergeron

AMBER ALERT IN INDIAN COUNTRY

TRIBAL PROSECUTOR NOW LEADING FIGHT TO HELP RECOVER ABDUCTED INDIAN CHILDREN



Hedi Bogda has a unique, perhaps unparalleled perspective on Native American culture and law. She is a tribal prosecutor, tribal judge and an enrolled member of the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe. Her background and skills are now being

used to train prosecutors, judges and law enforcement officers handling child abduction cases in Indian Country.

“Safety of children is my number one priority,” said Bogda. “Keep them safe and free from harm.”

The AMBER Alert Initiative in Indian Country asked Bogda to lead training efforts involving child abductions, exploitation and violence in tribal communities.

“She is truly an advocate for Indian Country and a great resource to address the challenges they face in protecting children,” said Jim Walters, Program Director, AMBER Alert Training & Technical Assistance. “She is humble, but is honestly the most impressive legal mind I know and is a true gift to Indian Country.”

Bogda said her father taught her how to argue when she was growing up and she always wanted to be an attorney. After getting her law degree from the University of North Dakota, she became a federal prosecutor who focused on crimes in Indian Country. She is currently working as a tribal prosecutor and a judge but plans to give her all to AMBER Alert training.

“One of the biggest strengths of the AMBER Alert in tribal communities is that you are working together for a child,” said Bogda. “The community as a whole takes care of their children and the AMBER Alert is a way to get tribes to band together to protect their children.”

However, she said many tribal communities still have a lack of awareness, resources and training about the AMBER Alert. “The remoteness of the Indian reservations creates a problem,” she added. “We need to get the tribe and the elders educated so everyone can work together.”

Bogda said her training will also be filtered by the fact she has a son and daughter in their teens. “From day one I was always trying to teach them safety words, how to be cautious about strangers and how to protect themselves on the computers,” she said. “It is scary having kids.”

But Indian Country now has a prosecutor, judge and mom making sure they are safe. 🍷



AMBER ALERT INTERNATIONAL

KEEPING CANADA'S AMBER ALERT PROGRAM COORDINATED

When Royal Canadian Mountain Police (RCMP) Constable Nancy Martin started working on Canada's AMBER Alert Program in 2009 she found the system working effectively but separately. She made it a goal to make the nation's child abduction alert program stronger than the sum of its parts.

"In years past, each province did its own thing, without any real knowledge of what other provinces were doing or how it could affect them," said Martin. "Now, as people can travel more easily and children are often transported over provincial and even national borders, the need for cooperation and teamwork has an even greater importance."

In 2010 the RCMP hosted the first National AMBER Alert Working Group (NAAWG) Workshop to bring all AMBER Alert partners together. All of the provincial AMBER Alert coordinators and others met to discuss how they could improve the system to help recover abducted children.

Martin is the National AMBER Alert Coordinator and works closely with Sergeant Jane Boissonneault, the Missing Persons Clearinghouse Manager and the NAAWG Chair. They continue through online training courses and teleconferences and sending regular emails to update everyone about the latest tool or innovation.

"Without Martin's dedication to the AMBER Alert program, we would not have the 10

provincial programs running as smoothly and working together as well as they do," said Boissonneault. "She is the 'go to' resource for inquiries about AMBER Alert from our partners across the country."

The two officers have also worked with the provincial AMBER Alert programs to put protocols in place between provinces and states that border each other to clarify what will happen when a child is taken across the border.

"Nancy has always been quick to offer support during a provincial activation of an alert and she has been the unwavering champion for the program," said Sgt. Steve Montpetit, Ontario Provincial AMBER Alert Coordinator. "She has been devoted to the AMBER Alert program and has provided a sound and consistent voice for the program on a national level.

Martin said working with Boissonneault as a team has made significant improvements in the program, but being a mom is what keeps her motivated. "No parent wants to hear that politics or lack of preparedness stood in the way of their child coming home safely," said Martin. "If I can help by providing avenues of training or the sharing of opportunities for improvement, I can't imagine not doing it. If we make it impossible for an abductor to hide, we make it possible for a child to be saved." ☺



AMBER ALERT INTERNATIONAL

MEXICO HOLDS SECOND NATIONAL AMBER ALERT FORUM

More than 160 participants from 28 Mexican states attended the second national Alerta AMBER (AMBER Alert) Forum on May 26-27, 2014. The two-day training was held in Mexico City and included case studies and best practices for using social media and other means to communicate quickly when a child is abducted.

Mexico's Attorney General's Office reported that 105 children have been recovered through the country's new child abduction alert system. Mexico issued 187 alerts nationwide between May 2012 and November 30, 2013.



The meeting in May was also used to launch Mexico's official AMBER Alert website: <http://www.alertaamber.gob.mx/>. The website will provide case management for distributing alert information. A mobile app was also developed to notify the public about an AMBER Alert. ☺

ONTARIO USING TWITTER TO SEND AMBER ALERTS



The Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) are now using Twitter and 511 road service to distribute details about an abducted child. By sending a tweet about an AMBER Alert, officers hope to reach thousands of cell phones and electronic devices within seconds. When motorists see an AMBER Alert on highway signs, they can dial 511 for more information about the suspect's vehicle and more. "The more tools we have available, the greater chance we have to safely recover a child who may be in danger," said OPP Deputy Commissioner Brad Blair. ☺

ODDS & ENDS

NEW DIGITAL EVIDENCE COURSE AVAILABLE TO HELP SOLVE CHILD ABDUCTION CASES

The AMBER Alert Training and Technical Assistance Program is now offering a Digital Evidence course to help first responders and investigators who handle child abduction, exploitation and child sex trafficking cases. The 3-day course shares methods to preserve, collect and analyze digital evidence and offers ways to understand the role digital evidence plays in an investigation. ☺

Read more: <http://amber-net.org/technicalassistance.html>



TWO MORE CHILD ABDUCTION RESPONSE TEAMS EARN NATIONAL CERTIFICATION

Two more Child Abduction Response Teams (CART) have received national certification from the U.S. Department of Justice. The Metropolitan Law Enforcement Council (MetroLEC) CART of Massachusetts and the Tacoma, Washington Police Department CART received the honors after meeting 47 standards of identified best practices and an onsite assessment of a mock child abduction exercise.

“These agencies are sending a message to the community that they are committed to recovering missing children,” said Alan Wolochuk, CART Certification Manager. “They are also sending a message to the bad guys that the children in this community have the best protection available.”

The MetroLEC is made up of law enforcement officers from several cities, towns and sheriff’s offices. On July 23-24, 2013, Metro LEC members conducted a mock child abduction drill in the Town of Norwood. The exercise was used to assess the team but it was also helpful to make their protocols stronger. “They did really well,” said Wolochuk.”

In February 2014, the MetroLEC CART became the second team in the northeast to earn the national certification from the U.S. Department of Justice.

The Tacoma Police Department CART responded to a mock abduction on September 11-12, 2013. More than 150 law enforcement officers and civilian personnel did their best to find a 14-year-old girl who had been taken from a bus stop near a park. A witness saw the struggle and called for help.

“The Tacoma CART’s response was professional, coordinated and excellently managed,” said Wolochuk.

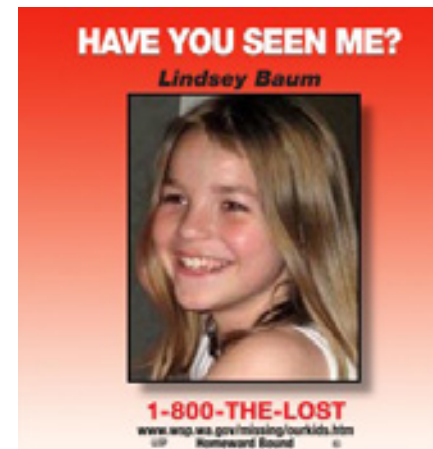
On December 20, 2013, The Tacoma Police Department received official notification from the U.S. Department of Justice of its certification, becoming the first CART to earn that distinction in the state of Washington. The U.S. now has 19 certified teams. ☺

ODDS & ENDS

SEMI-TRAILERS MOVE MISSING CHILDREN'S DAY MESSAGE

Two semi-trailers depicting images of missing children were used to help get out the message about National Missing Children's Day. The Washington State Patrol Missing and Unidentified Persons Unit had the trailers at the Wal-Mart in Tumwater on May 24, 2014. The trailers had images of Lindsey Baum, missing since June 2009 and Danica Childs, missing since December 2007. Officers also provided child safety information and fingerprinting for child identification kits. ☺

Read more: <http://kbkw.com/local-news/147583>



ONLINE AMBER ALERT TRAINING NEARS 19,000 COMPLETIONS FOR STUDENTS

More than 18,700 law enforcement officers and dispatchers have been trained through web-based courses offered by the AMBER Alert Training and Technical Assistance Program as of June 2015. The first online course was launched in March 2010 to help dispatchers bring missing and abducted children home safely. The Telecommunications Best Practices for Missing and Abducted Children (TELMAC) has received a 98.8% satisfaction rating from participants for exceeding expectations and providing relevant information for work.

Available AMBER Alert online courses include:

- Telecommunications Best Practices for Missing and Abducted Children (TELMAC)
- Patrol First Response for Missing and Abducted Children (PATMAC)
- TELMAC: Train the Trainer Module (TELMAC-TTT)
- Child Abduction Response Team (CART) New Member Training (CART-NM)
- Child Sex Trafficking: Law Enforcement Response, Online Introductory Module (CST Online)

Across all of AMBER Alert's online offerings, 98.6% of participants report the courses meet or exceed expectations and provide information and resources relevant and beneficial to their work.

AMBER Alert's five online courses and modules are available 24/7 so participants can access learning when they need it, at times fitting their busy schedules and work at their own pace. AMBER Alert's online learning courses and/or modules can also be blended with onsite/classroom training events. Complete details and links to register for any of the online courses can be found at www.ncjtc.org/AmberAlert/Courses/DistanceLearning. For more information or assistance, contact askamber@fvtc.edu or call 877-71-AMBER (712-6237). ☺

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