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Your story ideas and pictures are welcome.

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PROFILE: FRAN KEITH

LONGTIME AMBER ALERT PROGRAM MANAGER RETIRES, YET LEAVES STRONG LEGACY FOR HELPING ABDUCTED CHILDREN

The AMBER Alert Training and Technical Assistance Program (AATTAP) is proud to honor Mrs. Fran Keith on her retirement and to celebrate her 11 years of dedicated leadership and commitment to AATTAP staff, consultants and partners across the US and internationally. For more than a decade, Keith's expertise, attention to detail and unsurpassed professionalism were central to building the excellence for which the program has come to be recognized. Fran's careful and critical decision-making formed a bedrock of operations, while her tireless work with staff, partners and stakeholders fueled the program's innovations in finding new and better ways to protect children and safely recover those who were missing and abducted.

Keith began her career as an educator in mathematics. One might wonder how a math teacher from Norfolk, Virginia, became such a pivotal member of the AATTAP. Keith moved from her work in mathematics education to serving as a crime and business analyst for the Norfolk Police Department, progressing through her 31-year career there as a division manager in planning and research and a member of the department's senior executive team. In 2004, Keith joined AATTAP in a consultant role and soon became a program manager, providing leadership and her management expertise across all aspects and operations of the grant.

"I really did not have any personal experience with missing children," said Keith. "I was simply fortunate enough to meet the people who worked with the program. I learned so much from the AMBER Alert coordinators and other partners and was thrilled to be able to continue in a full-time capacity."

As the AATTAP worked to achieve the



Fran Keith

National AMBER Alert Initiative's goal of every state and territory in the US developing an AMBER Alert program, a central focus was to develop and provide training events across the nation. Keith's extensive background in operations management was key to executing the massive rollout of local, state and national training, conference events and related technical assistance required to achieve this significant goal.

"Since I started the improvements are too numerous to list," said Keith. "The expanding network of partners, development of training programs and new techniques for recovery such as social media, Endangered Missing Advisories, plus the outreach to tribal communities and partners in Mexico and other countries."

With Keith's help, AATTAP launched and successfully delivered an aggressive schedule of training programs designed to make missing children a "mainstream" issue for law enforcement and the public. Keith provided a legacy of excellence to the program and her colleagues, effective delivery and her innovative approaches to training and technical assistance continue on.

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PROFILE: FRAN KEITH

LONGTIME AMBER ALERT PROGRAM MANAGER RETIRES, YET LEAVES STRONG LEGACY FOR HELPING ABDUCTED CHILDREN

Continued from page 3

“The work is not over and should be continued for the welfare of America’s children,” added Keith. “Our children’s soft voice should be interpreted as a cry for help when they are endangered, so my hope is enough decision makers will be vocal supporters and maintain the training programs for law enforcement and communities.”

While Keith retired, she will no doubt maintain a keen interest in what can still be accomplished through the AMBER Alert Program. She would like to see more communities develop a Child Abduction Response Team (CART) and is passionate about the program’s involvement of helping victims of human trafficking.

“So many of the victims and survivors of human trafficking were at one time abducted or kidnapped at an early age,” said Keith. “Not every survivor was abducted or reported missing, some were just ‘thrown away.’ Regardless, the vast majority are ‘missing’ and need to be rescued.”

Keith believes training law enforcement, broadcasters and all AMBER Alert partners



are still needed to change policies, beliefs and practices, and will continue to represent a critical step for the U.S. to address the epidemic of human trafficking.

“Children are our most vulnerable population and if we do not rescue them and change our approaches, we will only compound the stress on all public service providers,” she said. “Many of the victims and survivors suffer from severe mental health challenges from their abduction and abuse.”

Fran and Phil Keith, former Program Director of AATTAP, recently married and now enjoy traveling and spending time with family and friends. They remain strong advocates for missing and abducted children and welcome opportunities to support and advocate for the work of child protection professionals across the country and around the world.

“I have many fond memories, and most importantly the relationships developed with such wonderful people,” said Keith. “My biggest disappointment is that we still need a program to find missing and abducted children.”

Editor’s note: *Despite my title, Fran Keith has been my editor for THE AMBER Advocate since its inception in 2006. She has read every word, corrected every typo, doggedly pushed for its publication and provided invaluable guidance for a publication that now reaches more than 50,000 AMBER Alert partners. “The AMBER Advocate brings real stories from the people who actually handle missing, abducted and endangered children cases and puts a face on the situations they deal with each day,” noted Keith. Personally, I will miss her but I am grateful for Bonnie Davis, who is also a skilled wordsmith, and has assumed Keith’s duties with this important publication.”*

TWO DECADES LATER:

FROM THE LOSS OF AMBER HAGERMAN, THE BIRTH OF A NEW PROGRAM TO RESCUE ABDUCTED CHILDREN

Twenty years ago on January 13, 1996, 9-year-old Amber Hagerman of Arlington, Texas, was abducted and subsequently assaulted and murdered. The tragic events and subsequent investigation of Amber's death sparked what has grown from a local, to nationwide and now international effort to improve and expand efforts to locate, identify and safely recover abducted children.

The AMBER Alert system bears Amber's name, and also stands for America's Missing: Broadcast Emergency Response. AMBER Alert Programs have helped bring more than 800 children home safely. "If it wasn't for Amber, we would not have the AMBER Alert today," Donna Williams, Amber's mother, told reporters.

Communities across the U.S. joined in observing National AMBER Alert Awareness Day on January 13, 2016. Here is a look at key milestones achieved over the past two decades:

- 2002: AMBER Alerts become nationally focused and highway signs are added to the warning system. President George W. Bush names the first National AMBER Alert Coordinator.
- 2003: The PROTECT Act is signed into law, strengthening the ability of law enforcement and the judicial system to prevent, investigate, prosecute, and punish violent crimes committed against children.
- 2005: A nationwide initiative to train Child Abduction Response Teams (CART) is launched.
- 2011: The Southern Border Initiative implements Alerta AMBER Mexico, a national protocol to coordinate child abductions in the U.S. and Mexico.
- 2015: The AMBER Alert Training and Technical Assistance Program launches a new Tribal Database website (www.tribaldatabase.org) to promote awareness and provide access to important child protection and human trafficking prevention resources for tribal communities.

Amber's mother continues on bravely, with hope that her daughter's killer will be found. "I'm not going to give up," she said. "I still have hope that he will be caught one day." ☺



The case of Amber Hagerman's abduction and murder remains unresolved. During the initial investigation, a witness reported seeing a man in a black truck grab her off her bike and drive away. Four days following Amber's disappearance, a man walking his dog found her body in a drainage ditch in Arlington.

A local citizen, Diane Simone, called a Dallas radio station the day Amber's body was found and asked if local broadcasters could team up with law enforcement to somehow get information out immediately following a child abduction. Dallas and Fort Worth area broadcasters began work to establish a coordinated system with local law enforcement whereby they could warn the public when a child was kidnapped and in danger. Over the two decades that have followed, the AMBER Alert system has grown through grass-roots efforts at the local, regional and state levels. AMBER Alert programs are now operating in every state across the U.S., and have been developed in other countries around the world.

CART: CHILD ABDUCTION

TWO ADDITIONAL CHILD ABDUCTION RESPONSE TEAMS RECEIVE NATIONAL CERTIFICATION

The U.S. Department of Justice has certified two additional Child Abduction Response Teams (CART). The Pasco County Sheriff's Office in Florida and the Pierce County, Washington, Regional CART are the latest teams to meet the rigorous standards required to join the elite ranks of certified teams across the U.S.

"Support starts at the top," said Alan Wolochuk, CART Certification Manager. "The total commitment of the sheriff and top law enforcement leaders for both teams set a standard for all CARTs to follow. The citizens in these communities should be very proud of what has been accomplished."

The CART certification process is very challenging, requiring teams to meet 12 standards and demonstrate proficiencies outlined across 47 sections of the AMBER Alert CART Certification Manual. The CART must conduct a mock child abduction exercise which includes scoring across areas including: CART response and AMBER Alert activation, call-intake procedures, leads management, incident command structure, resource management, information technology, legal issues, victim assistance and reunification.

In Pasco County the mock abduction utilized a mock city named "Safety Town," a scaled

down version of a small city containing a small park, residences, bank, home improvement store, streets, sidewalks and a school. This was the first certification conducted in a facility of this kind.

The mock abduction began at 9 a.m. and involved the witnessed abduction of a 10-year old female. The female was abducted while walking to a school bus stop. A witness called law enforcement and reported the incident.

"We fight as one," said Pasco County Sheriff Chris Nocco. "Being part of the CART Certification process was extremely rewarding. It helped validate all the hard work and training we did and continue to do. Preparing for the protection of our children is one of the most important things we can do for our community. No agency can ever truly be ready for an abducted child investigation. However we are committed to being as ready as we can."

The Pierce County Regional CART had more than 100 participants during the certification process including the sheriff's department, federal and state investigators, police and fire departments, prosecutors, emergency management and the 911 call center.

The U.S. now has 21 certified Child Abduction Response Teams. 🍷



Pasco County CART certification exercise



Tacoma CART certification exercise

RESPONSE TEAMS

CERTIFICATION IS NOT THE END OF TRAINING FOR CHILD ABDUCTION RESPONSE TEAMS

For Child Abduction Response Teams (CART), achieving certification by the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, is just the beginning. Following initial certification, the CART must prepare to meet the criteria for annual recertification every year thereafter.

In January of each year, following the awarding of initial certification, the CART must be able to show completion of specified tasks and required documentation in order to maintain its certified status. Requirements for annual re-certification include:

- Absent an actual CART activation, the CART is required to conduct at least one field exercise during the calendar year. The CART is required to provide a summary of each incident to include the date, circumstances of the incident, number of individuals and agencies activated, out-

come and lessons learned and changes made to policy, practice, use of resources or personnel deployment or other significant changes to the CART.

- Document any changes to personnel, CART leadership, participating agencies, resources and any significant changes to the CART.
- Verify the CART remains in compliance with all applicable standards and certification requirements.

The required recertification forms must be signed by the CART Coordinator and CEO of the lead agency, certifying the accuracy of the information provided. The documentation is forwarded to the CART Program Director during the first quarter of each year following certification. Once reviewed and approved, the CART is notified of its recertification status. ☺

MICHIGAN LAUNCHES BLUE ALERTS FOR FALLEN AND INJURED OFFICERS

Michigan will now issue a Blue Alert if a law enforcement officer is killed or seriously injured on the job. Legislators said they wanted the alert because a suspect who is willing to kill or injure an officer is a serious danger to the public. The alert will report where the incident occurred along with a description of the suspect and vehicle. The information will be sent to media outlets and cell phones. Michigan is believed to be the 25th state to adopt the Blue Alert system since it began on February 1, 2016.



ON THE FRONT LINES:

SMALL NEBRASKA POLICE AGENCY MAKES BIG SAVE THROUGH AMBER ALERT AND TEAMWORK

Megan Smetter woke up on the morning of Saturday, February 20, 2016, to discover her two-month-old son Jaxon, her friend Earnest Howard, 35, and her car were missing. She reported the incident to the Fairbury, Nebraska, Police Department for help at 7:15 a.m. An officer was immediately dispatched in an attempt to locate the missing vehicle and make contact with the suspect.

The initial responding officer contacted Fairbury Police Chief Chad Sprunk at 11:15 a.m. that morning and requested additional assistance; he also requested consideration of issuing an AMBER Alert. Chief Sprunk personally called the missing child's mother to verify that the case met the criteria for an AMBER Alert.



Fairbury Police Chief Chad Sprunk

"I was convinced it met the criteria because of the suspect's prior drug use, violent criminal history, a previous attempted abduction of a child," said Sprunk. "He was also not the biological father of the child, didn't notify the mother he was taking [him] and refused to bring the child back."

The Fairbury Police Department notified the media and law enforcement in the

area about the possible abduction. The AMBER Alert was issued at 2:26 p.m.

Nebraska State Patrol Lieutenant Jeromy McCoy is the state's AMBER Alert Coordinator. He was without his laptop when he received the call for the alert. He called another officer for help and the alert was quickly sent to the state's electronic highway signs and broadcast via the Wireless Emergency Alert System. However, obtaining pictures of the suspect and victim required approximately 20 additional minutes before the AMBER Alert was posted to the Department's website.

"These images were in a different format that caused our webpage to crash when we attempted to submit the AMBER Alert," said Lieutenant McCoy. "We determined the problem and changed the format to a JPEG."

The Fairbury Police Department has six full-time officers. The small department's phones quickly starting ringing with tips and possible sightings of the suspect's vehicle, including tips from Ohio, California, Kansas, Missouri and Texas. Help also started pouring in from several county sheriff's offices, the Nebraska State Patrol, the FBI and several civilian organizations offering assistance in working tips and the investigation.

"I required everyone to contact the agency where the tip was generated," said Chief Sprunk. "Absolutely no tip was set aside and not handled."

This was the 18th AMBER Alert issued by Nebraska since its program began in 2002. It was the 7th alert issued by Lieutenant



Suspect, Earnest Howard

McCoy since he became a verification officer in 2007. He became the state's AMBER Alert coordinator three years ago. However, it was the first alert for the Fairbury Police Department, and it added strain to AMBER Alert veterans as well as everyone who was new to the alert system.

"Obviously, you think the worst has happened to the child; however you still have hope the child is safe," said Chief Sprunk. "It was extremely emotional not knowing what the outcome was going to be."

"The longer an AMBER Alert goes on, the more worried I get," added Lieutenant McCoy.

A citizen called to report the suspect's vehicle was stuck in the mud in Fairbury. Police located and arrested Howard and the baby was taken to a local hospital. The AMBER Alert was cancelled at 6:41 p.m., about 4 hours after it was initiated.

"If I could see that person, I don't know how I would be able to thank them," expressed Megan Smetter in speaking to KOLN-TV about the person who provided the tip leading to Howard's location. "I think there was more anger and fear I would never see him again."

Howard was taken to jail and booked on charges including kidnapping, felony child abuse and making terroristic threats. His case is still pending and all suspects are presumed innocent unless they are convicted. Police said Howard also had a glass pipe used in smoking methamphetamine in his possession and could be charged at a later time with that offense.

"I do feel the AMBER Alert saved the child's life," said Chief Sprunk. "If the alert did not go out, the citizen who located the suspect and child would not have known about the abduction."

The Fairbury Police Department has trained for years on the AMBER Alert system, but lessons are always learned after each alert---especially the first one.

"Time is of the essence," said Chief Sprunk. "If there is any doubt, send the AMBER Alert out to the coordinator immediately. It was so easy and flawless working with the Nebraska State Patrol on getting the alert out."

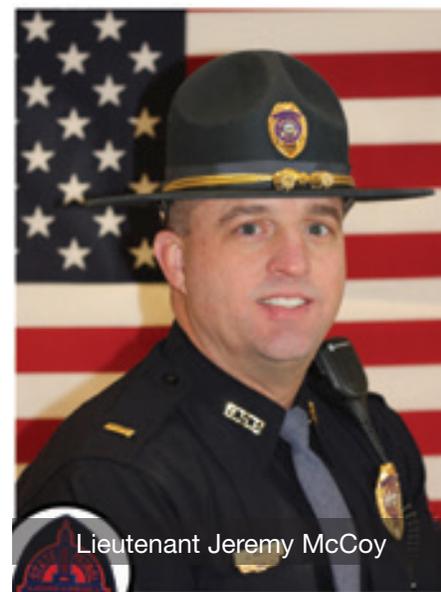
Nebraska also has a strong AMBER Alert committee that reviews every alert issued.

"We review problems and make changes based on input from media, law enforcement and other AMBER Alert partners," added Lieutenant McCoy. "We have good discussions and try to make the alert process better after each one."

Both the AMBER Alert coordinator and the police chief said this alert is further proof the AMBER Alert system is a vital tool to save abducted children.

"Children are vulnerable and can't control their environment or circumstances they are put in," said Lieutenant McCoy. "I do whatever I can do to protect this segment of our society."

"Safety of the children is what motivates me," added Chief Sprunk. "Children are helpless and fragile and it puts them in a very scary and unsafe environment." 🍷



AMBER ALERT IN INDIAN COUNTRY



Visit
TRIBALDATABASE.ORG
to learn more about
the 2016 National
Child Protection
Symposium &
Leadership Forum.



MICHIGAN SEEKS ACTIVE SHOOTER ALERT

A bipartisan effort by legislators in Michigan hopes to create a statewide active shooter alert system. The legislation was spurred after a shooting spree in Kalamazoo left six people dead and two seriously injured. The proposed bill would have the Michigan State Police send alerts via radio, television and text messages when there are “urgent and immediate threats” to public safety.



OHIO MOTHER CHARGED WITH FALSELY CLAIMING BABY WAS MISSING

A West End, Ohio, mother was indicted for falsely reporting her newborn baby was missing, prompting an AMBER Alert. The 28-year-old mother reported the incident on March 3, 2016, which led to a lengthy pursuit by local and federal officers and the public. The mother’s car had been stolen, but police say she lied about the child still being inside the car.

AMBER ALERT
BRIEFS

AMBER ALERT INTERNATIONAL

U.S. AND MEXICO TEST COOPERATION IN MOCK CHILD ABDUCTION EXERCISE

Law enforcement officers in Texas, California, Arizona and Mexico worked together to safely recover a child during a mock abduction exercise on March 18, 2016. The AMBER Alert Training and Technical Assistance Program (AATTAP) provided an Internet-accessible platform for collaboration and the real-time interaction of all participants. The event presented participants with a challenging scenario-based incident involving a child abduction in Mexico in which coordination and assistance from AMBER Alert Plans in the U.S. was utilized to safely recover the child.

“This new training method allows us to test the technology needed to connect child protection officials in the U.S., Canada and Mexico and continue to improve our ability to react quickly and effectively to abductions and predators across our borders,” said AATTAP Director James Walters.

The first of its kind table top exercise included representatives from Dallas and Laredo, Texas; Sacramento, California; Phoenix, Arizona and the Attorney General’s Office in Mexico City, Mexico. On May 25, 2016, Mexico also hosted an International Missing Children’s Day event with AMBER Alert coordinators from Canada, Mexico and the U.S.

Janet Turnbull, resident legal advisor at the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City and the Office of Overseas Prosecutorial Development Assistance and Training (OPDAT) program, was involved to support Mexico’s Alerta Amber program.

“We are looking for ways to increase cooperation between Mexico and the U.S. on cross-border abductions involving children,” expressed Turnbull. “This training helps us accomplish this important goal.”



Technology is helping to bring cross-border AMBER Alert efforts closer together

NEW STUDY EXAMINES HOW AMBER ALERT IS BEING USED IN EUROPE

A new study finds the AMBER Alert program is working in Europe but still needs improvement in some countries. Researchers Karen Shalev Greene and Charlie Hedges interviewed representatives of the AMBER Alert programs in the Netherlands, United Kingdom, Czech Republic and Poland.

Of the 28 European Union (EU) member states, the study found 16 European countries have child alert systems; however, only 8 countries have used the system at least once. The participating countries in the study are among the most active users of child alert systems, issuing 19 of the 23 EU alerts in 2015 (83%).

The study also found the following:

- Public pressure caused the offenders to surrender to authorities.
- The child was identified by a member of the public.
- The alert and coordination that followed led to a police force in a different country finding and safely recovering the child.
- Members of the public volunteered to search for the child, which assisted in police efforts.
- The integrated rescue system proved very useful.

The entire report can be accessed here: http://ftp.amberalert.eu/research/university_ports-mouth_usefulness_child_alerts.pdf

AMBER ALERT BRIEFS



Michael Lyman, left, and Darin Gilbert, right

NEW MEXICO OFFICERS HONORED FOR FINDING MISSING NEW HAMPSHIRE BOY

Two Farmington, New Mexico, police officers were recognized for finding a missing boy after an AMBER Alert was issued in New Hampshire. Officers Darin Gilbert and Michael Lyman arrested the boy's father and recovered his 18-month-old son after recognizing them from the alert. The suspect tried to flee but was stopped after officers put spikes on the road to stop his vehicle. The officers were given the Meritorious Service Award at the Maine Association of Police Awards Banquet.

IOWA MAN HONORED FOR FINDING TODDLER AFTER AN AMBER ALERT



Paul D. Smith

The Jefferson County Chiefs and Sheriff Association in Wisconsin recognized an Iowa man as the "2015 Citizen of the Year" after hearing an AMBER Alert and helping officers safely recover a 3-year-old Milwaukee girl. Authorities said a 32-year-old man forced the girl's mother out of her car and drove off with the child still inside. Paul D. Smith was sitting in his hotel room when he saw the AMBER Alert on TV. He went out to the hotel parking lot and discovered the missing vehicle and called the sheriff's department. Deputies arrested the suspect after he tried to flee his hotel room.

"My dad always said we are put on this earth to help one another and I try and honor him by doing that every time I get a chance," said Smith at the awards ceremony. "I am so grateful and humbled that I was able to do that in your community and, with law enforcement, we were able to return a child to her home."



SILVER ALERTS ARE HELPING TO FIND MISSING PEOPLE IN WISCONSIN

Wisconsin has issued more than 100 Silver Alerts since the program began two years ago. The alerts are used for missing persons over the age of 60 and who suffer from Alzheimer's or another cognitive disorder. The Silver Alerts appear on more than 3,700 lottery terminals across the state.

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