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United Response gives hope to families of the missing

By KATHERINE MATTHEWS Daily Light correspondent

MIDLOTHIAN -- No one should have to cope with a loved one that disappears without a trace, but tens of thousands of children and adults are reported missing each year.

Statistics show that the numbers of missing/and or exploited persons are on the rise.

In the past two years there has been a ray of hope for the families of missing people in Texas with the creation of a nonprofit organization called United Response Search and Rescue Team based in Midlothian.

Founded almost two years ago by Dana Ames and Sheila Holland, they, with hundreds of members and volunteers, have a partnership with local and state authorities to search for missing people.

Founded in memory of Opal Jo Jennings, a 6-year-old girl who was abducted and killed in 1999, the organization gives hope to families in desperate need of assistance in their time of crisis.

The Red Cross, fire and police departments, psychologists, pilots, foot search teams, divers, canine and horse teams to name a few, are volunteers, partners, or members of this extraordinary team.

They work hand in hand to use every medium possible to find the missing, and make sure everyone involved is safe.

Sometimes the volunteers or the team have been put in dangerous situations, but have been backed by law enforcement to keep them out of harms way.

The team is on call year round to be of service to anyone that requires it free of charge. Periodically, they will give educational awareness programs and identification programs so as to prevent serious situations from arising.

Ames and Holland work on a case by case basis with their resources to make sure that everything possible can be done to find loved ones when everyone else has given up hope of finding them.

One of the unique aspects about this organization is that they work to find anyone, not just children.

They will find Alzheimer's patients, the mentally challenged, runaways, and adults who are missing.

URSASTEAM has an 87 percent success rate in finding the missing person, which will give the families hope that their case is not a lost cause.

The team serves as a liaison between the families and the law enforcement as well as counseling and emotional support to the families. URSASTEAM will even use their resources to help with funeral arrangements if they are needed.

The team has also implemented an identification kit that would be of service to the authorities if someone were missing.

The kit includes fingerprints, personal and family history as well as medical history, DNA collection swabs, and a hair sample kit with all the instructions on how to take those samples.

The team wants to be able to give these to everyone, especially elementary schools and low income families. This kit would be a

tremendous help so as to quicken the process of finding the loved one.

Since the organization is nonprofit, it relies solely on donations given by sponsors and the surrounding community.

It is our jobs, as the community, to make sure that this team is funded if we were ever in need of their services.

The organization is available at www.ursarteam.org or call (817) 501-9296. They will accept donations by mail or online, and you can sign up to be a volunteer in one of the many areas of service. You can also donate some of these much needed items: laptop and desktop computers, digital cameras, GPS equipment, copy machine, DVD/VCR players, 2-way radios, office space, etc.

For a complete list of items, please email the team at ursarteam@ursarteam.org. Without the community coming together and becoming educated about this problem, children and adults alike will be forgotten in their most critical time of need.

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