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Businesses step up in search for Ayla Reynolds

WATERVILLE — As law enforcement agencies continue searching for 20-month-old Ayla Reynolds, several community businesses have rallied to support them.

BY BEN MCCANNA



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At least 14 companies have either aided in the search or provided free meals for the searchers.

ADDITIONAL PHOTOS



VIGIL: Heather Mirucki, left, and Ashley Tenney, right, light candles at a teddy bear shrine in front of the home of missing girl Ayla Reynolds, below left, on Violette Avenue in Waterville on Thursday night. *Staff photo by Michael G. Seamans*



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One of the companies, Central Maine Disposal in Fairfield, provided six paid employees to the search Thursday, president Mickey Wing said.

It was the second day of searching for Wing's staff. He estimates he is spending "a few thousand dollars" per day in labor fees.

"We just want to be out there and do what we can," he said. "The more people that are out there looking, the more chance there is of finding something."

Company vice president Charlie Wing said the company's search efforts began in a different capacity earlier this week.

Four truck drivers inspected all trash receptacles owned by the company — nearly 600 in all — on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. Their inspections included ripping open every trash bag for a close look at the contents.

“We searched every can that we dumped, and every load that has gone to the landfill has been searched as well,” he said.

Evan St. Jean, a driver for the company, has helped with the searches. The work is grim, he said.

“I’d like to get a phone call saying she’s alive someplace, but doing a search like this, it’s really hard to be optimistic,” he said.

Other companies are providing warm meals to searchers.

Liane Hatch, conference and events manager at Best Western Plus on Main Street, has helped organize a community effort.

It all began Monday, when two fellow employees of Best Western Plus learned that searchers had no refreshments or food.

“They called me up and said, ‘Why don’t we get some coffee and muffins together,’ and here we are,” Hatch said Thursday. “It snowballed from there.”

On Monday, employees from Best Western Plus set up food at Fran Purnell Field on Mathews Road.

On Tuesday, Hatch began calling local grocers and restaurants to ask for assistance. Those businesses were eager, she said, because people feel the need to do something.

“It’s a sad situation,” she said of Reynolds’ disappearance. “Nothing like this has happened around here, so people don’t know quite how to handle it or what to do. Once you call people they’re like, ‘Oh, thank you. Yes, we’ll donate.’”

On Thursday, the daily buffet that included support from Big G’s, The Corner Store in Oakland, Dunkin’ Donuts, Governor’s Restaurant, Hannaford, Papa John’s Pizza, Red Barn, Sam’s Pizza, Subway, Tim Hortons, Walmart and Wendy’s moved from Mathews Road to Head of Falls off Front Street. Hatch estimates that more than \$1,000 in food is being donated every day.

Peter Tait, head chef at Best Western Plus, has been turning those supplies in hot meals for about 100 people every day, including his day off Tuesday.

The reason for doing it is simple, Tait said.

“It’s a community thing,” he said.

Lt. Adam Gormely has served with the Maine Warden Service for the past 18 years. He has participated in searches before, but never one of this magnitude, he said.

He appreciates the support from local businesses.

“I’ve seen community support like this before, but it’s always refreshing when I see it again,” he said. “To be able to eat like this after you’ve searched all day is a huge help.”

Gormely said more than 100 searchers were out Thursday. Searchers included, fire fighters, Maine Association of Search and Rescue volunteers, wardens and community members.

Dave Martin is president of Dirigo Search and Rescue, one of 15 volunteer groups affiliated with the Maine Association of Search and Rescue. Six of those groups have been assisting in the search for Reynolds.

Martin said 18 members Maine Association of Search and Rescue volunteers searched on Thursday, along with 11 civilian volunteers.

Gormely said the volunteer searchers are most deserving of the food that area businesses provide.

“I’m getting paid to do this. It’s my job,” he said. “I don’t mind paying for my own lunch, but the volunteers who are doing this deserve a warm meal.”

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