



Posted May 25, 2012

Updated December 12, 2014

As media glare dims, search for Ayla continues

WATERVILLE -- At the onset of a missing child case, investigators offer new details nearly every day and news outlets clamor to tell them.

BY BEN MCCANNA



Share



Comment

WATERVILLE — At the onset of a missing child case, investigators offer new details nearly every day and news outlets clamor to tell them.

Eventually, however, media coverage wanes.

“Unless there’s a change in the case, the majority of news media will not keep a case high up in the news,” said Cynthia Caron, president and founder of LostNMissing — a nonprofit organization that advocates for families of missing persons. “Eventually, it gets tucked away.”

When that happens, it’s up to the families and friends of lost children to keep awareness high, and it’s up to the public to pay attention, Caron said. An alert public can sometimes crack a case.

Today is National Missing Children’s Day. The day was declared 29 years ago by President Ronald Reagan to mark May 25, 1979, the day 6-year-old Etan Patz disappeared from his New York City neighborhood — a case that continues to capture national attention. On Thursday, a former Manhattan store clerk, Pedro Hernandez, was arrested after he told police he strangled Etan.

May 25 serves to remind the public of their role in bringing children home; to “pay close attention to the posters and photographs of missing children,” according to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. Caron will mark the day using online social media to profile about 100 New England children who are still missing.

One of those children is Waterville toddler Ayla Reynolds.

Police in central Maine have been searching for Ayla Reynolds for more than five months. Apart from a few organized searches on land and waterways, there have been no major developments in the case since late January. Media coverage has similarly declined.

Caron, who provides support to Ayla’s mother Trista Reynolds, said families and friends need to step in and fill the void by organizing events or hanging posters.

“Ayla’s case is a high-profile investigation in Maine — probably a majority of people are aware of it — but there are still people out there who are not, and you never know when one of them may have that crucial bit of information,” she said.

As an example, Caron cited a 2009 missing person case. On Dec. 13 of that year, police found an abandoned vehicle on Interstate 95 in Clinton that belonged to Sarah Rogers, 29, who was reported missing from Massachusetts.

The case received a lot of media attention and volunteers blanketed businesses at all interstate exits in Maine with posters, Caron said. Despite the high level of media exposure, it took several weeks before a married couple in Clinton learned of the case during a nationally televised appearance by Rogers’ parents. The couple lived near the site where Rogers’ car was abandoned, and the husband eventually found Rogers’ body while searching for clues near his property.

Caron also said organizing events like vigils or walks can have broad reach.

“It’s something new for the media to report, and they bring the case to the forefront again,” she said.

Trista Reynolds is organizing a July 14 walk in Portland. Reynolds said she’ll do whatever it takes to keep awareness high.

“I don’t want anyone to forget she’s missing,” she said. “I won’t let that happen with Ayla. It won’t happen.”

Caron said opportunities to raise awareness are abound.

“When you look at Ayla’s case, there’s two totally separate sides of the family, so that doubles the

potential to have events,” she said.

Caron, who has assisted about 1,600 families over 10 years, said she is confident investigators will bring closure.

“I am 100 percent positive this case will be solved. How long? I can’t say. In my own personal opinion, they are doing a lot of focus on water searches, and, from my own knowledge, it could take a very long time before a body can be found,” she said.

Department of Public Safety Spokesman Steve McCausland offered no updates on the case Thursday.

“The work continues. There are no new developments,” he said.

In January, McCausland announced that investigators had found undisclosed amounts of Ayla’s blood at her Violette Avenue home. McCausland also said investigators removed several hundred items from the house as potential evidence, and ruled out the possibility that Ayla was abducted.

Investigators also believe the three adults who were with Ayla the night before she was reported missing — father Justin DiPietro, aunt Elisha DiPietro and Courtney Roberts — are withholding information.

Ben McCanna — 861-9239

READ OR POST COMMENTS

Share



Were you interviewed for this story? If so, please fill out our [accuracy form](#)

[Send questions/comments to the editors.](#)

RECENT

READ

SHARED