

Silver Alert system launched in Pinellas

On Tuesday, the Largo Police Department held a press conference announcing that Pinellas county will institute a new Silver Alert program. On Oct. 8, Gov. Charlie Christ will sign an executive order putting the new system into effect in Florida. There are 501,480 people with Alzheimer's in the state and 34,334 in Pinellas County, according to the Florida Department of Elder Affairs.

Gus joined officials including Rep. Bill Young, State Rep. Ed Hooper, and Largo Police Chief Lester Aradi to discuss the progress of Silver Alert initiatives. Gus became involved in the Silver Alert initiative largely as the result of what happened to an 86-year-old Largo woman named Mary Zelter.

Zelter, who was diagnosed with dementia, left her adult care center in her car on Feb. 26 and ended up in the Intracoastal Waterway, a drowning victim. Zelter's daughter, Mary Lallucci of Belleair, has called for a Silver Alert system and has lobbied officials to set one up in Florida. She attended the news conference today:

"The Silver Alert will save lives," she said. "We all know the number of seniors who will wander is staggering, and now we have a program and a way to help and assist other families from the tragedy that my family experienced."

You may recall that the U.S. House passed legislation which includes key portions of a bill sponsored by Gus to create a federal grant program to help states establish silver alert notification systems to help find missing seniors:

"This is an example of things can get done in Washington D.C. Things can get done when you work on a bi-partisan basis," Billirakis said.

Aradi and other Pinellas officials have pushed for the statewide notification system:

"That's the beauty of this program because all the systems are in place through Amber Alert we anticipate the cost to be minimal," Aradi said.

The Florida Silver Alert Enhancement program will send bulletins statewide when an elderly person goes missing while using a vehicle. The information will be posted with news agencies and placed on state highway message boards. Authorities say there is already a system in place for those who wander off by foot.