

THE AMBER ADVOCATE

**GROWTH SECTOR:
TECHNOLOGY FOR EMERGENCY
RESPONSE TO MISSING PERSONS
EVOLVES ACROSS THE NAVAJO NATION**



**AMBER[®]
ALERT**

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Your story ideas and pictures are welcome.

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Navajo Nation member Christopher Becenti at Window Rock Park's "Ear of the Wind" sandstone formation in Arizona. As Executive Director of the Navajo Nation Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (NNTRC), Becenti is making meaningful strides in bolstering the Navajo's technological infrastructure, which is vital for public safety. Less than half of all homes on the reservation had fixed Internet service as of 2020, according to the American Indian Policy Institute, "but that's rapidly changing," Becenti said. Credit: Navajo Nation

Yes WEA Can

With the Navajo Nation's COVID-19 emergency response in high gear, tech leader Christopher Becenti is closing 'the digital divide' to make life safer in his community

By Denise Gee Peacock

May 2, 2016, was supposed to be a happy occasion for Christopher Becenti; it would mark his 30th birthday. "But it was one of the worst days I can remember," he said. "All I could do was sit on the sidelines and watch" as confusion and grief shook the Navajo Nation to its core.

On that fateful day, 11-year-old **Ashlynnne Mike** was abducted by a stranger near her home in Shiprock, New Mexico. Her family's frantic outreach efforts to find her were fraught with jurisdictional misunderstandings and slow communication responses that delayed the issuance of an AMBER Alert by 12 hours. By then it was too late. Ashlynnne had been brutally murdered.

The Navajo Nation vowed never to allow a similar situation to happen again. And Becenti,

a tech-savvy member of the Navajo Nation who then worked in the private sector, knew "something had to be done," he said. "I knew one day I wanted to help my people get better connected."

In April 2018, the **Ashlynnne Mike AMBER Alert in Indian Country Act** was enacted, providing the country's 574 federally recognized tribes with funding and opportunities for more technology, training, and pathways to stronger partnerships with state, regional, and federal authorities.

Within a year of the law's passage, Becenti was tapped by Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez to be the Executive Director of the Navajo Nation Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (**NNTRC**). His task:

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untangle a web of problems posed by local and national wireless carriers and mobile device manufacturers to ensure Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEAs) could be sent to everyone eligible to receive them. He also needed to “creatively strategize how to expand broadband access to our most remote territories,” since he had few resources at the time.

A year into his position, however, the Navajo Nation would face down a devastating public health crisis: the COVID-19 pandemic. Pre-pandemic, the Navajo Nation had been at the forefront of strengthening public safety infrastructure to bolster its emergency/crisis response capabilities, including AMBER Alerts. “The pandemic, however, accelerated everything we were working on,” Becenti said.

Though his mission is clear-cut, the work is not. But major advancements are occurring thanks to his tireless efforts, Navajo Nation leadership support, and COVID-19 financial relief from the U.S. government.

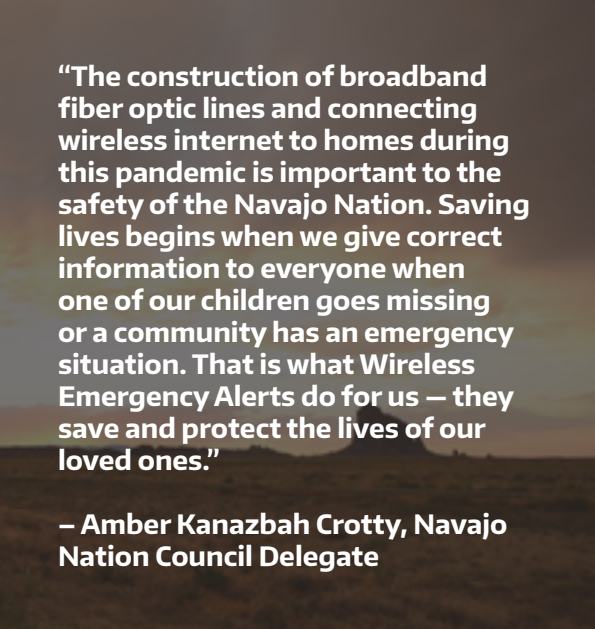
The **Navajo Nation** is the country’s largest Indian reservation, encompassing three states (Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah) and 27,000 square miles (about the size of West Virginia). But only a small percentage of its 173,000 citizens have access to broadband for reasons ranging from their homes being

in remote locations to prohibitive costs. And 911 emergency services are problematic. When a Navajo Nation citizen uses a mobile phone or even a land line to call 911, the call is rerouted up to two times in order to reach the nearest law enforcement agency (LEA) communications center. Many Navajos who live in rural areas do not have standard addresses, and must rely upon P.O. boxes. In addition to the delay and potential dropped calls that rerouting causes, the lack of a street address can impede or altogether prevent the ability of the LEA to pinpoint the caller’s location.

These **problems** became painfully clear during the pandemic, when Navajo citizens could not immediately connect with

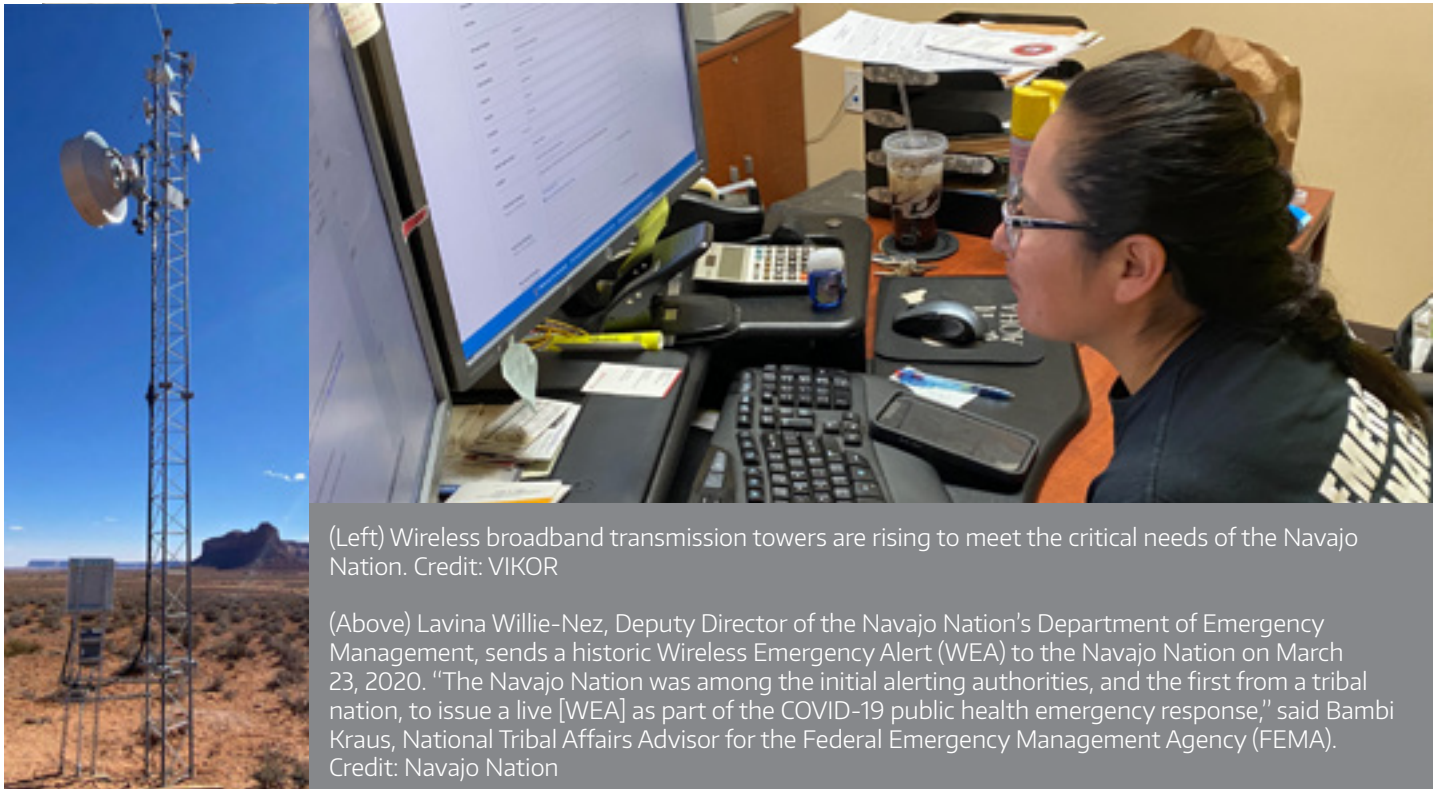
emergency services. Reportedly, some citizens died trying to reach a payphone, or a neighboring home with telephone access (which might be 20 miles away) or while attempting to get to a place with a stronger cellular signal.

Additionally, people in remote areas could not receive COVID-19 WEAs or connect to online sources of news, specifically the **Facebook page** of Navajo Nation President Nez. “Many use computers at community centers, which shut down along with most public spaces,” Becenti said. “On top of that, people could not work from home or have their children learn remotely.”



“The construction of broadband fiber optic lines and connecting wireless internet to homes during this pandemic is important to the safety of the Navajo Nation. Saving lives begins when we give correct information to everyone when one of our children goes missing or a community has an emergency situation. That is what Wireless Emergency Alerts do for us — they save and protect the lives of our loved ones.”

– Amber Kanazbah Crotty, Navajo Nation Council Delegate



(Left) Wireless broadband transmission towers are rising to meet the critical needs of the Navajo Nation. Credit: VIKOR

(Above) Lavina Willie-Nez, Deputy Director of the Navajo Nation's Department of Emergency Management, sends a historic Wireless Emergency Alert (WEA) to the Navajo Nation on March 23, 2020. "The Navajo Nation was among the initial alerting authorities, and the first from a tribal nation, to issue a live [WEA] as part of the COVID-19 public health emergency response," said Bambi Kraus, National Tribal Affairs Advisor for the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Credit: Navajo Nation

The situation was bleak, and a lot to tackle, but with lives at stake, Becenti set his sights on fixing WEAs, since many Navajos reported being unable to receive them on their cell phones.

After numerous conversations with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), Becenti began to see the big picture. And the source of the problems.

Becenti began working directly with a host of carriers to resolve technical issues while also enticing major carriers such as AT&T and T-Mobile to invest in providing coverage to the Navajo Nation. And while he was able to rectify issues with Android phones that prevented some users from getting WEAs, one smartphone maker was a holdout: Apple. WEAs were inaccessible to phones sold by smaller companies who were unable to order

units in the large numbers Apple required for the phones to be fully provisioned to accept WEAs. Becenti and smaller carriers that serve the Navajo Nation made numerous attempts to discuss the situation with Apple, but repeated calls and emails got them nowhere.

Fortuitously, when the FCC invited the public to submit comments about WEA concerns in early 2021, Becenti recognized the Navajo Nation needed to respond immediately. It would be their best chance at getting Apple to pay attention and resolve the situation.

On April 20, 2021, the NNTRC and Navajo Nation Office of the President and Vice President (OPVP) formally submitted comments to the FCC with the assistance of Washington D.C. area attorney James E. Dunstan of the Mobius Legal Group.

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“Thankfully, our concerns were heard loud and clear,” Becenti said.

Within eight months, Apple announced all iPhone users who upgraded their software to iOS15 would have access to WEAs.

Despite feeling like David taking on Goliath, Becenti was amazed by the win. So was the Navajo Nation leadership. After Apple’s announcement, Navajo Nation President Nez said, “The safety of our elders and those most vulnerable is important as we keep our Navajo families informed of any emergency. We can now immediately alert the Navajo people should one of our family members go missing or there exists a public safety threat.”

“Now we have about 99% penetration of WEAs on our wireless devices,” Becenti said. “We just need everyone to update their iPhones to get to 100%.”

To mitigate COVID-19’s devastating impact on the U.S. economy, the American Rescue Plan Act (**ARPA**) was signed into law (Pub L. No. 117-2) on March 11, 2021. It built upon many of the measures of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (**CARES**) Act of 2020 by ensuring affordability and access to broadband infrastructure for federally recognized Indian tribes/ indigenous communities and other rural regions. Additional help followed with the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (**H.R. 3684**), signed into law November 15, 2021.



On January 4, 2022, Navajo Nation leadership signed Resolution CD-62-21, approving \$557 million in American Rescue Plan Act funds for the Navajo Nation. Credit: Navajo Nation

Funding for the construction of new broadband connections across the Navajo Nation primarily stems from **Legislation No. 0257-21**, which provides more than \$1.16 billion in ARPA funding.

In November 2021, the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) began accepting applications from tribes for the **Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program**, which provides \$980 million through the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021. (NTIA limits funding applications to \$55 million per tribe.) And by December 1, 2021, the 24th Navajo Nation Council met to discuss allocation of the myriad ARPA funds and grant applications for broadband internet expansion and public safety.

“Through the American Rescue Plan Act, our administration has a proposal before the Navajo Nation Council to allocate \$208 million for broadband projects,” said Navajo Nation President Nez. “The Navajo Nation Telecommunications Regulatory

Commission Office continues to look at many ways of leveraging many sources of funding to expand broadband for homes, first responders, schools, businesses, and others."

Navajo Nation Vice President Myron Lizer added, "We are very optimistic that these collective efforts will lead to many new towers, fiber lines, and high-quality internet for our Navajo people and communities."

As millions of dollars in funding awaits approval and allocation, Becenti is working with Navajo Nation leadership to achieve a number of goals, including: creating a single network, FirstNet, to be dedicated for first responders; gradually consolidating the Navajo Nation's seven emergency dispatch call centers into a single facility that has full 911 routing capabilities; completing the Nation's

rural addressing initiative, which will allow 911 dispatchers to see the caller's location and develop a database for record-keeping; and partner "in more creative ways" with the Navajo Tribal Authority, the Nation's utility company.

Beyond the technical achievements, Becenti is most deeply motivated by knowing WEAs are reaching the Navajo Nation and saving lives, while he works to "close the digital divide."

Six children have been recovered following two separate AMBER Alerts thanks to WEAs that would not have been as widespread as they are now. "Knowing the public can now receive such alerts is an amazing feeling," Becenti said. "Every minute counts when there's an active AMBER Alert. We all have to be connected." 🌄



The Navajo Division of Public Safety canceled a Sept. 23, 2021, AMBER Alert for four children who had been abducted that day by their father, who threatened to harm them. "After receiving the WEA, the father knew he was being searched for, so he abandoned his SUV and the children were found unharmed," said NNTRC Executive Director Becenti. Credit: Navajo Nation

FRONT LINES: TEXAS



Christopher Ramirez with his mother, Araceli Nuñez, immediately after his rescue. Credit: Grimes County Sheriff's Office

Miracle in Texas: AATTAP Child Abduction Response Team expert's help contributes to safe recovery of toddler missing four days

By Denise Gee Peacock

The chances of finding 3-year-old Christopher Ramirez alive dimmed as the **days passed**.

On Wednesday, October 6, 2021, Christopher's mother, Araceli Nuñez, had been unloading items from their van at their Plantersville, Texas, home when a neighbor saw Christopher follow the family dog into the nearby woods. When Christopher's mother returned for her son less than two minutes later, she learned what happened. A panicked search by the boy's family and friends got underway, but within minutes the dog returned home — without

Christopher. That's when Grimes County law enforcement was contacted for help.

As the Grimes County Sheriff's Office swung into action, Lieutenant James Ellis reached out for help from AMBER Alert Training and Technical Assistance Program (AATTAP) Associate Chuck Fleeger, a 35-year veteran law enforcement officer in Texas who currently serves as Executive Director of the AMBER Alert Network Brazos Valley ([AAN-BV](#)).

"This is a perfect example of a united effort and team coordination. Although there was no AMBER Alert issued, there was an alternative Missing or Endangered Persons Advisory (MEPA) that helped get information disseminated in a timely fashion. I think it gives a great perspective for alternatives if the case does not meet the AMBER Alert requirement."

– Derek VanLuchene, AATTAP CART Program Coordinator

The AAN-BV, formed in 2003, is a collaborative effort between more than two dozen local law enforcement agencies throughout the

Brazos Valley in Central Texas. Operating in conjunction with Texas's AMBER Alert Network, the AAN-BV provides local, state, and federal emergency management resources, local media outreach, and more for cases involving abducted and missing at-risk children.

With Grimes County being an hour south of Fleegeer's home in the Bryan-College Station area, he began making daily 100-mile roundtrip visits to the area to do what he does best: strategizing how to supplement law enforcement resources while bolstering media outreach and anticipating future needs.

While Grimes County conducted search and canvass operations, Fleegeer helped solve the first problem. "Based on our state's criteria the case didn't qualify for AMBER Alert, so we went with a Regional Endangered Missing Child Advisory, which would allow a Wireless Electronic Alert (WEA) to be issued," Fleegeer said. After securing a photo of Ramirez, he typed up a brief description of the child and was able to get a poster to the media and public within 30 minutes.

In coordination with Lieutenant Ellis, Fleegeer began rallying resources from his network of law enforcement specialists.



AATTAP Associate Chuck Fleegeer (right), Executive Director of the AMBER Alert Network-Brazos Valley, says his dedication to recovering abducted, at-risk children stems from two key moments in his life. "When my daughter was born in 1991, I started thinking, if something like this happened to my child, would I be 100% ready? I then had a chance to take a class hosted by the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, and afterward I told my wife, 'I want to do this type of work for a living one day.' Slowly, somehow, that became a reality." His son, Joseph (left), is now following in his law enforcement footsteps. Credit: AMBER Alert Network-Brazos Valley

"We don't move in and take over, we try to fill in the missing gaps," he explained. Fleegeer enlisted help from an adjacent county's fire department, the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, and TEAM Adam. He called in a canine team and requested drone assistance. He suggested a mobile command post be set up away from where the investigation was taking place.

By the third day of the search, hundreds of Emergency Medical Service (EMS) providers, firefighters, law enforcement agents, and partners from federal, state, and local jurisdictions, as well as private search groups, led the charge while the news media and the public did its part. Investigators went door to door, checked surveillance cameras, pools, sheds, and even drained one pond while searching two others.

By the third day of the search, some suggested calling off the intensive effort, believing it impossible that a 3-foot-tall, 40-pound toddler could survive without sustenance or shelter for so long. But Grimes County Sheriff Don Sowell was adamant. "We're not leaving until we find him." He called on the community to pray for the boy's safe recovery as Christopher's mother sobbed.

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"My heart has a hole in it," she said in Spanish.

That evening, Tim Halfin did just that with his Bible study class. Afterward he felt like God wanted him to go look for the boy.

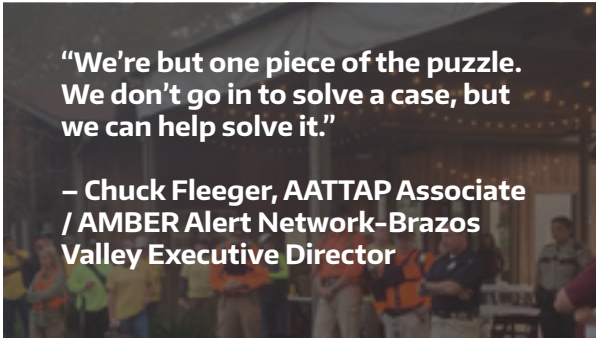
The next morning, Saturday, October 9, Halfin set out on that mission at 9:45 a.m. Within an hour he heard what sounded like a child's voice in distress near a pipeline in the distance. He called law enforcement to tell them his location — about 10 yards into a thicket off a road nearly five miles from Christopher's home.

"It was overwhelming," Halfin recalled. "First you think this is a dream, but then I realized that it was him. I cradled him on my hip and said, 'Little man, God has a purpose for you.'"

Soon Christopher and his mother were **reunited**, both in tears. Her son was hungry, scratched up, dehydrated, and bug-bitten, but otherwise in good condition. "God put everybody here in his path," Nuñez said.

Ramirez spent several days at Children's Hospital at The Woodlands, north of Houston, before being released and escorted home. He returned in a hero's fashion, accompanied by a **procession** of first-responder vehicles with lights flashing.

Finding Christopher "was definitely a miracle — one combined with a lot of dedication



"We're but one piece of the puzzle. We don't go in to solve a case, but we can help solve it."

— Chuck Fleegeer, AATTAP Associate / AMBER Alert Network-Brazos Valley Executive Director

and teamwork," Fleegeer said.

TOP TAKEAWAYS FROM THE CASE

Fleegeer is working on an all-inclusive case study about Ramirez's search and recovery for AATTAP Child Abduction Response

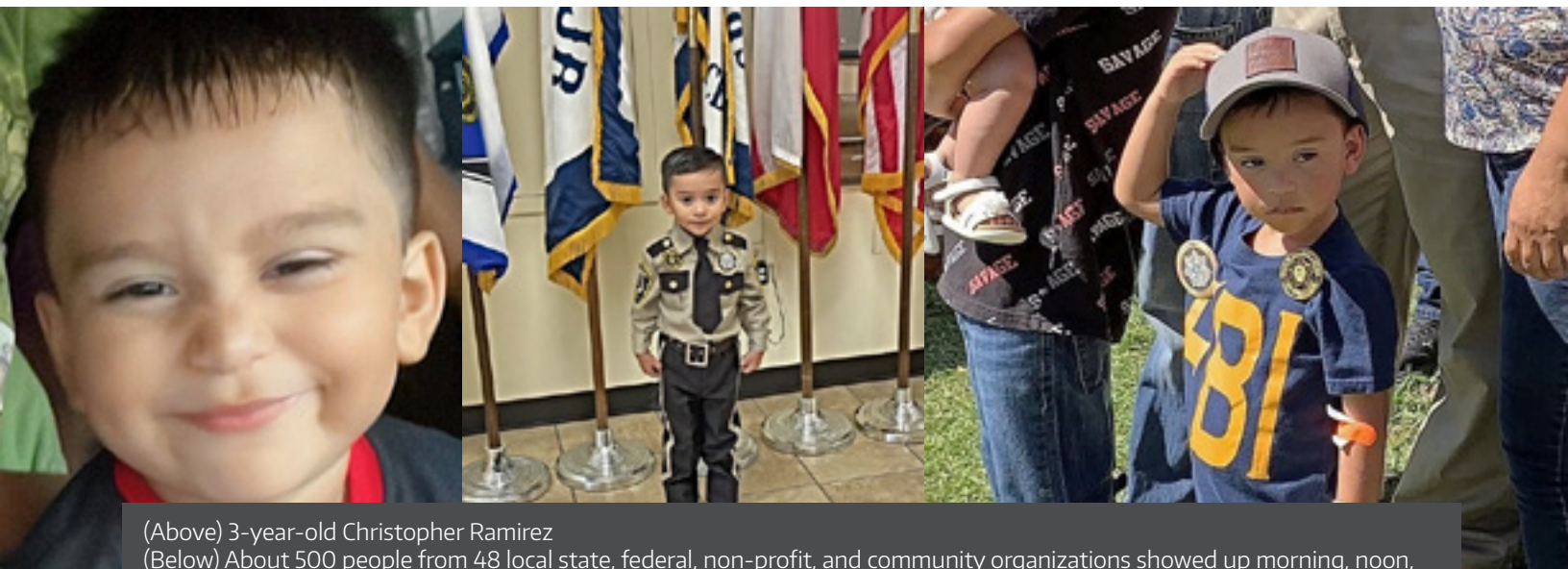
Team (CART) training. He is also preparing a brief overview of the case to discuss at the March 2022 AATTAP National Symposium. Meanwhile, he offers these words of wisdom:

- **"Never give up.** And stay positive. Sheriff Sowell exemplified that by saying, 'We're not in recovery mode. We're going to keep trying to find Christopher.' And they did."
- **"Cultivate strong working relationships and teamwork.** Lieutenant Ellis had my cell number and called me directly. And I have others' cell numbers and they have mine. We understand what we're here to do and respond to the call."
- **Pay attention to your team's well-being.** "I noticed that Grimes County Sergeant Martha Smith had been assigned to stay with Christopher's mother the entire time," Fleegeer said. "I offered to find some Spanish-speaking support for her. She told me that although she was tired, she thought she could make it. The main thing that lifted her spirits was me simply asking, 'Are you OK?'"
- **AATTAP training pays off.** After seeing in an AATTAP training class how using a shortened URL (via bit.ly) in a WEA linked to a verified Twitter account

allows more information to a greater audience, Fleeger tried it during the Ramirez case. "It was one of the coolest things," he said. "I was standing there during a search briefing and saw everybody's phones go off at the same time. Even in that little corner of Grimes County, the tweet reached more than 33,000 people."

- **For states wavering on having a CART program, "Don't," Fleeger said.** "They are incredibly valuable. You have to build up muscle memory through

repetition to be ready for cases like these when they happen. And while child abductions are incredibly rare, the good thing is, many of the skill sets learned in CART training can be applied to any investigative response, from capital murder to an armed robbery," he said. "A 99% success rate in canvassing is just not good enough."



(Above) 3-year-old Christopher Ramirez

(Below) About 500 people from 48 local state, federal, non-profit, and community organizations showed up morning, noon, and night to assist in the search for young Christopher.

Credit: AMBER Alert Network-Brazos Valley, Grimes County Sheriff's Office



FRONT LINES: ILLINOIS

Illinois woman honored for responding to an AMBER Alert and saving baby tossed in a ditch

By Paul Murphy

The Alton, Illinois, Police Department honored a woman for responding to an AMBER Alert and finding a baby who had been taken during the theft of a van. At the July 14, 2021, event, Alton Police Chief Marcus Pulido remarked that Brittney Ford saved the 3-month-old baby's life.

"We put that AMBER Alert out to try to solicit some help and sure enough we got help, and it was beyond impressive," said Pulido.

The ordeal began March 26, 2021, when Gena Wilson's van was stolen from her driveway. Her daughter Ghvadi Jaber was still inside the vehicle. "I thought she was gone," said Wilson.

Wilson called the police department for help at 7:30 p.m. — five minutes after the child and van were taken. An AMBER Alert was requested at 9:00 p.m. Illinois AMBER Alert Coordinator Craig Burge issued the alert at 9:33 p.m. after determining the situation met the state's criteria for the child abduction alert.

"Because time is of the essence with any alert, once a call comes in with a case that would qualify for an AMBER Alert, we immediately try to gather information that will galvanize the public's interest in helping us find the missing child," said Burge. "The most important thing we can do as an alerting authority is to collect the most accurate information possible to disseminate. And

that process starts immediately."

The Illinois State Police disseminated the alert to broadcasters through the National Weather Service (NOAA) Weather Radio and a secondary blast fax/email that is posted on all Illinois state websites. The information is also displayed on Illinois Department of Transportation and Tollway roadway message boards.

Illinois is divided into three areas for AMBER Alert distribution, allowing notifications to be sent to just one area or a combination of the three.

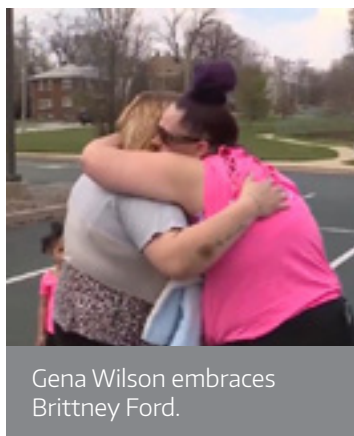
"Any time you have a situation with someone stealing a car, you never know the motive of the person," Burge said. "You hope the AMBER Alert deters them from

continuing with the crime, but you also want to make sure the child is found in a timely manner. It can get cold at night in Illinois, and you want to ensure the child is not subject to those elements for a long period of time."

After hearing the AMBER Alert, Brittney Ford drove 12 miles from her home in Brighton and picked up her aunt Jenny Mawhee in Alton to start looking for the missing child.

They were driving in the cold with the windows down so they could hear if the baby was crying.

At 11:40 p.m. they were on a road that is not heavily travelled and heard the baby's cries.



Gena Wilson embraces Brittney Ford.

They found the infant face down in a ditch on the side of the road. "I still cry sometimes because it's an emotional thing," said Ford. "If it was my baby, I would want everyone out there."

The child was found cold to the touch and taken to the hospital, but she did not have any serious injuries. The AMBER Alert was canceled at 12:04 a.m.

"This private citizen is a true hero," said Burge. "There is no better feeling than being notified a child has been located safely. I think all my counterparts in every state would agree with me that this feeling is why we are so passionate about the AMBER Alert program."

Gena Wilson shed tears of joy after finding out her baby had been found. "It was complete selflessness," Wilson said about the Good Samaritan. "She took the time to look for my baby even though she has her own family."

A 15-year-old boy was arrested and has been charged as an adult with attempted murder, kidnapping, and offenses related to motor vehicles in connection to the incident.

Illinois is seeing a rise in vehicle thefts and car jackings. Burge said these crimes are becoming more difficult and dangerous to investigate because the offender is often unknown and descriptive information is rarely available and can be limited.

Burge has been with the Missing Persons Unit at the Illinois State Police for 12 years. As the unit administrator, he is the AMBER Alert Coordinator, Missing Persons Clearinghouse Manager, and coordinator for the Silver Search and Blue Alert.

"People want to help, and most of the time they don't get the chance," Burge said.

He continuously trains telecommunicator/call-takers so they can process and disseminate alerts as fast and efficiently as possible. "The key is knowing the right questions and asking for the right information, so you are not hunting for the details later."

Burge said it is important to be persistent in your approach to AMBER Alerts. "Consistency in your process leads to increased speed and efficiency of your alert," he concluded. "If you have the same processes, the same people making the calls and the same coordination with law enforcement, your plan will be more widely respected and ultimately more effective."

"The ultimate gratification is to see an abducted child returned home safely. This is why the AMBER Alert program means so much to me, and the reason I take great pride in its success." 🌟



Alton Police Chief Marcos Pulido honors Brighton resident Brittney Ford.

FACES OF THE AMBER ALERT

From the ground floor to saving lives: Wisconsin AMBER Alert Coordinator Melissa Marchant's decades of work in criminal justice and missing persons

By Paul Murphy



Melissa Marchant, Wisconsin AMBER Alert Coordinator and Missing Persons Clearinghouse Manager

Melissa Marchant has been Wisconsin's AMBER Alert Coordinator and Missing Persons Clearinghouse Manager since May 2021. Last year Wisconsin had 11 AMBER Alerts, a record for the state. She started working for the State of Wisconsin as a janitor in 1990, right after graduating from high school. Marchant went on to work as a program assistant at the Wisconsin Department of Justice, Division of Criminal Investigation (DCI). She then became a criminal analyst, a position she has held for 18 years.

Marchant has been an advocate for criminal analysts as the president of the Wisconsin Law Enforcement Analyst Network (WILEAN). Although she began actively participating in AMBER Alerts in late 2019,

she was already a member of the Child Abduction Response Team (CART) and worked as an analyst during callouts for cases involving missing persons.

She is a mother of two children, grandmother of four, and has always loved spending time with young ones. Marchant respects and appreciates law enforcement efforts in missing person cases. She also has profound admiration for families who hold on to hope while everyone is trying to find their missing loved one. "Our kids deserve the best resources and collaboration when they go missing," said Marchant. "It is our job and duty to bring them home safe, and Wisconsin encompasses all of that."

WHAT IS UNIQUE TO YOUR AMBER ALERT PROGRAM AND WHAT DO YOU THINK HELPS MAKE IT SUCCESSFUL?

We have amazing partners who help us disseminate information through many means as quickly as possible when we are trying to locate a child. The support and determination of these agency partners is truly amazing.

During an AMBER Alert in Wisconsin, you could be driving down the road and see it on the highway DOT signs, hear it on your radio, observe another message on outdoor advertising billboards and see it on the lottery terminals when pulling over for gas at a convenience store. In addition, TV, radio and social media help us get the message out. I'm truly amazed each time we issue an AMBER Alert by the vast and quick response from everyone.

WHAT MOTIVATES YOU TO FIND MISSING AND ABDUCTED CHILDREN?

When a child goes missing, I treat the situation as if it involved my own child or grandchild. I worry and pray for them like they were my own family. I do everything I can to bring them home safe and hopefully keep them out of danger. This job motivates me to keep hope alive and use all available resources to find missing children and bring them home safely.

WHAT CHALLENGES DO YOU FACE IN MAINTAINING THE EFFECTIVENESS AND STRENGTH OF YOUR AMBER ALERT PROGRAM?

I think the challenge we are constantly looking at is the timeliness of our alerts. We usually review each AMBER Alert about a week after the alert is issued to identify ways to expedite the process and learn from our experiences. There is no 'big red easy button' — it takes a tremendous amount of quick and effective coordination to make the alerts happen.

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE HAPPEN WITH YOUR AMBER ALERT PROGRAM IN THE FUTURE? WHAT IS YOUR VISION FOR THE PROGRAM?

I am looking forward to expanding our online and social media presence. I believe that sharing online stories and posters of our missing will help us reach many more people than what is happening now.

PLEASE SHARE DETAILS ABOUT YOUR MOST MEMORABLE SUCCESS STORY IN WORKING A MISSING CHILD CASE. HOW DID THE AMBER ALERT SUPPORT THE OUTCOME? WHAT WERE THE MOST IMPORTANT LESSONS LEARNED?

I was a criminal analyst when Jayme Closs went missing in October 2018. I was attending our department's in-service

training with just an overnight bag. When our agency got the call to assist, I immediately requested to go to Barron County. I responded to the command post and set up tips and leads for the initial response. I then worked with the FBI to continue organizing and maintaining a strong system.

I remember not wanting to go back home, I just wanted to stay and help in any way I could. I stayed for 15 days, and it was difficult to leave. I felt so connected to this response and the search for Jayme, and the AMBER Alert brought in so many tips. The citizens did an amazing job of reporting anything they could to try and help locate her.

Ultimately, it was Jayme's bravery and determination that allowed her to escape and return to her family in January 2019. I am inspired everyday by Jayme, a truly brave young woman who made the decision that she was going to escape and gain back her freedom.

HOW HAVE YOUR CAREER AND LIFE EXPERIENCES, INCLUDING YOUR WORK AS AN AMBER ALERT COORDINATOR, STRENGTHENED YOUR COMMITMENT TO HELPING ENDANGERED MISSING AND ABDUCTED CHILDREN?

My dedication to endangered and missing abducted children has been strengthened by my experiences in the Clearinghouse, working with families, law enforcement, NCMEC, and the AMBER Alert Program at Fox Valley Technical College (FVTC). I also feel my role as a criminal analyst in DCI, prior to being the AMBER Alert Coordinator, gave me an advantage in assisting on missing person cases by providing me with invaluable resources and training. I worked side-by-side for years with special agents,

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AMBER ALERT INTERNATIONAL

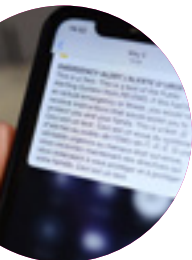
AMBER Alert Europe launches 'Friend or Monster?' campaign

AMBER Alert Europe initiated an awareness campaign called "Friend or Monster?" to educate the public about children being sexually abused or harmed by someone they know, love, or trust. The campaign began on November 18, 2021: the European Day on the Protection of Children Against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse. Officials decided on the theme because the pandemic has led to more children being closed in with their abusers and have fewer chances to seek help. 🍷



Ukraine and Facebook create partnership for AMBER Alerts

Ukraine has created a Facebook AMBER Alert network to inform the public when a child is abducted. Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelensky invited Facebook to broaden its operations in the country to expand key communication channels. 🍷



Municipal officers in Canadian province can now issue AMBER Alerts

National and municipal police officers in Prince Edward Island (P.E.I.) are now authorized to send AMBER Alerts and other public emergency alerts. The provincial government will no longer require police to seek authorization from the Emergency Measures Organization so the alerts can be issued faster. 🍷

Canadian mother urges support for Missing Adult Alert

The British Columbia mother of a woman who was found dead after she went missing wants Canada to create an “adult alert” for missing people over the age of 18. The body of Alina Durham’s 23-year-old daughter Shaelene Bell was discovered June 2, 2021, in a river four months after she went missing. Durham started an online petition to create Shaelene’s Missing Adult Alert so law enforcement can notify the public if an adult is missing and at risk of imminent danger or death. 🍷



Slovenia hosts international conference on missing persons

Slovenia invited police experts from 26 other European countries to discuss best practices to find missing children and elderly people. The international conference was held January 9, 2021, with the cooperation of the Police Expert Network and AMBER Alert Europe. 🍷



Police in Rome sign agreement with AMBER Alert Europe

Law enforcement officials in Rome have signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the AMBER Alert Europe Foundation to formalize efforts to issue alerts and find missing children. The Polizia di Stato agreed to have officers receive more training so they can cooperate and assist law enforcement efforts to find missing children throughout Europe. 🍷



AMBER ALERT BRIEFS



AMBER HAGERMAN REMEMBERED 26 YEARS AFTER HER MURDER

On January 13, 1996, 9-year-old Amber Hagerman was kidnapped and murdered in Arlington, Texas. But her legacy lives on through the nationwide AMBER Alert system that has helped more than 1,000 children return home safely. "It's another legacy for my daughter, that she didn't die in vain, that she is still taking care of our little children as she did when she was here," said Amber's mother, Donna Williams. "So, I'm very proud of my daughter for all she has done for our children here." January 13 is now National AMBER Alert Day, a day to remember Amber Hagerman and all the other children who have been kidnapped and murdered. It is also a date to celebrate those who have been saved and efforts still being made to help missing and abducted children. 🍷



UTAH SENATOR AIMS TO BAN AMBER ALERTS IN CUSTODY CASES

A Utah senator wants to stop AMBER Alerts from being used in custody disputes between parents. Senator Todd Weiler is seeking to ban the alerts in custody cases after an AMBER Alert was issued for four children taken by their non-custodial mother. The girls were later found safe in California. The Utah Department of Public Safety responded that AMBER Alerts are only used when a child has been abducted and their life or safety is in danger. National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) data estimates more than 200,000 children are abducted each year by a parent or family member. 🍷



SIGNS WITH ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE BEING USED FOR AMBER ALERTS

Electronic signs in Arlington Heights, Illinois, are now using Artificial Intelligence (AI) so AMBER Alerts, tornado warnings, and other public emergencies will take precedence over any other messaging. The signs will soon be used in smart cities, convention centers, and airports. 🍷



WASHINGTON CONSIDERS ALERT FOR MISSING AND MURDERED INDIGENOUS WOMEN

Washington state lawmakers are proposing a Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women Alert System that would be similar to AMBER and Silver Alerts. Washington Representative Debra Lekanoff said the alert would be used to raise awareness of missing Native people. The National Crime Information Center has found that Indigenous women are reported missing and murdered at a rate 10 times the national average — and murder is the third leading cause of death for Native American women. 🍷

SERVICE STATIONS NOW POSTING AMBER ALERTS ON GAS PUMPS

More than 26,000 service stations are now posting AMBER Alerts and information about missing children on television monitors installed on gas pumps. The national media network GSTV started the program ADAM (Automated Delivery of Alerts on Missing Children) in 2019. GSTV is working with NCMEC and said the gas pump screens reach 96 million people in 48 states each month. "It's not just about advertisements and entertaining, but taking the opportunity to engage our viewers at a time where they're extremely attentive," said GSTV executive Violeta Ivezaj. "There isn't a whole lot to do when you're pumping gas." 🍷



WISCONSIN PARENTS OF MURDER VICTIM WANT ALERTS FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CASES

The parents of a 21-year-old woman murdered by her husband is asking officials to create a "Bianca Alert" to help victims of domestic violence. Timothy Cox, stepfather of Bianca Vite, said the alert is needed because an AMBER Alert or Silver Alert could not be issued to help save his stepdaughter. County officials say they will continue to discuss the idea with Cox to see if the alert is feasible. 🍷



DENVER ADDS NEW SYSTEM FOR NON-AMBER ALERT NOTIFICATIONS

Denver has started a new opt-in service to issue emergency notifications other than AMBER Alerts. The city will still send AMBER Alerts through Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEAs) but will use Everbridge for other types of alerts. WEA is overseen by the Federal Emergency Management Agency and limits what types of alerts can be used on the system. People can select what types of alerts they want to receive and in what areas through Everbridge. 🍷



TASK FORCE OFFERS HELP FOR NATIVE HAWAIIAN SEX TRAFFICKING VICTIMS

Hawaiian lawmakers launched a task force to gather data and study the impact of sex trafficking on Native women and children. Researchers found that 64% of sex trafficking victims are Native Hawaiians. Local activists blame tourism and the lack of law enforcement resources to stop the widespread abuse across the islands. "If there's no data, there's no problem," said Khara Jabola-Carolus, Executive Director of the Hawaii State Commission on the State of Women. She added concrete numbers are needed to understand the scope of the problem. In 2020, the Hawaii Attorney General established a human trafficking coordinator to develop training and increase the number of prosecutions. 🍷



FACES OF THE AMBER ALERT

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detectives, officers, and prosecutors around the state to help bring missing persons home or violent criminals to justice.

I was excited to take on a role in which I could work with victims' families more, but also continue to work with all the talented law enforcement individuals in Wisconsin to assist on missing person cases. Every time I see a face of a missing person it reminds me that they deserve to have someone looking for them, and my goal is to do everything I can to return them home safely.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO OTHER AMBER ALERT PARTNERS?

Establish and maintain strong and frequent communication with your partnered agencies; they are invaluable. Do what makes sense for your state. Each state has different needs based on their missing population and available resources. Also, take advantage of the FVTC training and regional meetings. Connect with community partners, as well as other AMBER Alert Coordinators, because these will truly be invaluable connections. 🌟