

November 13, 2008

**FROM THE SHERIFF'S DESK....**



***Delaware County Sheriff's Office announces its Implementation of Project Lifesaver***

On behalf of the Delaware County Sheriff's Office I am pleased to announce our participation in a joint venture with the Schoharie County Sheriff's Office, sponsored by Ann Thayer, Program Manager of the Leatherstocking Region Alzheimer's Association and with the support of the O'Connor Foundation, Cornell Cooperative Extension, the Delaware County Senior Council and the Delaware County Office for the Aging to bring Project Lifesaver, a rapid response program aimed at locating victims suffering from Alzheimer's disease (and related disorders such as Down syndrome and Autism) who have wandered and become lost, to Delaware County. I am also pleased to acknowledge the involvement of the New York City DEP Police who have generously agreed to support this project by making available the resources of their agency, including their helicopter. This program is already up and running in neighboring Otsego County and will be operational in ours effective December 15, 2008.

Civil Sgt. Dwayne Finkle and three other members from our department have been trained to participate in this search and rescue program – and coincidentally, consider their participation a privilege. They will become acquainted with each of the participants as they visit them monthly to replace the batteries in their Lifesaver equipment. Since people who wander are often suspicious and uncooperative, it is important that they be approached by someone who has been trained to gain their trust and with whom they are personally familiar and have built a bond.

Delaware County presently has approximately 1,500 people suffering from dementia. Over 5,000,000 people nationwide are plagued with this disease, which destroys brain cells, thus causing problems with memory, and it is ranked as the sixth-leading cause of death in the United States.

**Here's how it works.** Participants in Project Lifesaver wear a wristband, pin or necklace equipped with a small battery-operated radio transmitter which emits an individualized tracking signal every second, around the clock. When we are notified that a participant has gone missing, we assign a specially-trained Sheriff's Office employee to respond to the missing person's last known location with an antenna (mobile locator tracking system) to home in on their signal in order to locate the person who has wandered.

**What does it cost?** The wristbands routinely cost approximately \$280.00 and the batteries need to be changed each month at a cost of \$10.00. (Financial assistance is available, if needed.) **What is the alternative?** In contrast, normal search and rescue operations can involve up to 260 searchers and require close to 1,000 man hours over several days, according to Project Lifesaver. Missing person searches are estimated to cost the taxpayers approximately \$1,500.00 per hour.

**What does it give?** Peace of mind. **How well does it work?** 100 % of the time **What is the average recovery time?** 20 minutes (This statistic lessens all the time. In 2006 it was 45 minutes.)

**Where do I sign up:** If you are interested in signing up, or wish to inquire about this program, please call the Delaware County Sheriff's Office at 746-2336 and ask to speak with Sgt. Dwayne Finkle on Extension 317 or Ann Thayer at the Alzheimer's Association at 607-547-1650. Project Lifesaver may also be accessed directly via the web.