

# Texas EquuSearch Quarterly Newsletter

February 2010

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*Each of our newsletters contains information that might be of interest to our members ... such as a Search Tip, case summary of a few of our recent cases, special announcements, training schedules and a "Final Thought." The purpose of our newsletter is to keep you better informed on what's happening in our organization. Whether your resource is searching on foot, ATV, horse, boat or "Special Operations" ... you are a very important part of this organization. And we gratefully thank you for your tremendous efforts, and what you do to bring missing persons home to their worried families and friends.*

**Newsletter Search Tip:** Many searchers absolutely need the accessibility of a cell phone on a search for a missing person because they may have a job that requires them to be accessible by phone. They may have small child or an ill relative that they must keep in contact with. That is completely understandable. But casual chatting will not be allowed on any active search assignment. And under no circumstances will any searcher be allowed to read or send text messages during and active search assignment. If you are searching in a wooded area and start reading text messages as you go along, you very-well might have just walked by the person you are supposed to be looking for. Yeah, while you were messing with the text messages, you might have walked past a grave or some kind of potential evidence. We need you complete and undivided attention when we are searching for someone. There should not be any casual talking or personal chatting among searchers when you are out there looking for a person. It's not the time to discuss your personal life or what you might do after the search. Never wander away from the search line without getting explicit verbal permission from your team leader **first**. You should never walk away alone to check something out; because valuable time will be spent trying to find out where you are or trying to locate you.

**Our newsletter contains brief summaries of some of our recent case searches we have worked. Many details can not be revealed because some of the cases are still under investigation, and we do not want to jeopardize any part of any law enforcement investigation. But we will attempt to keep you informed on what we can.**

## Recent Case Summaries:

**Navy Pilot, Lt. Bret T. Miller & Navy Pilot, Lt. John J. Houston:** About 11:00 a.m. on Sunday - November 15<sup>th</sup> 2009, TES members Ralph Baird and Dennis and Tammy Watters located the missing U.S. Navy T-34c trainer plane that had crashed into the Gulf of Mexico about 2½ weeks earlier. The trainer plane lost contact with the Naval Air Station control tower about 3:20 p.m. on October 28<sup>th</sup> 2009. The remains of Lt. Bret T. Miller were found about 11 miles north<sup>th</sup> of Port Aransas, Texas on October 30<sup>th</sup>. Using side-scan sonar

and their special expertise in these types of searches, the Texas EquuSearch members searched for several days, until they received images of the missing aircraft submerged in about 48 feet of water, and 1.5 miles offshore of the Matagorda, Texas shoreline. The rough and murky water conditions made any attempts of immediate recovery very difficult at that particular time. The Navy started its recovery operations a couple days later after the waters settled. During the recovery operations, one body was found inside of the downed Navy aircraft. At that point, no positive confirmation could be made that the remains were those of Navy Lt. John J. Houston. But just one hour after our last newsletter (November 2009) was posted, the remains found inside of the downed Navy aircraft were positively identified as those of Navy Lt. John J. Houston. Our thoughts and prayers go out to the families, friends and naval buddies of Lt. John Houston and Lt. Bret T. Miller. They proudly served -- and they died while training to protect us ... and our freedom.

**Luis Martinez (Amber Alert):** On Friday afternoon – November 27<sup>th</sup> 2009, two year old Luis Martinez disappeared in Valrico, Florida after he wandered away from the home of a neighbor's home in a mobile home park. A neighbor was allegedly babysitting Luis when he unknowingly wandered away. It wasn't until Luis' parents went to get him that they realized he was missing. A search quickly started and an "Amber Alert" was soon activated. EquuSearch members from all over Florida converged on Valrico to help search for Luis. Luis wasn't found by any searchers that night. The searchers continued their desperate search throughout the area on Saturday morning. Authorities brought in scent dogs, horses and helicopters to help find Luis. While searching an area about 50 yards from Luis's home, a searcher noticed a large clump of over-grown weeds with a small 11"-13" hole in the ground. It turned out to be the opening of an old septic tank. Authorities called for a truck to drain the sludge and see if Luis was inside. About 2:00 p.m., police officials confirmed that there was a body of a young child inside the tank. Also inside was a toy truck. Everyone was shocked that a child could have fallen into such a small opening. The protective cover was also lying at the bottom of the tank. The tank was almost full of sludge and hadn't been drained for many years. Regardless of the sad outcome, the EquuSearch members responded very quickly and did a great job. All of you can be proud of yourselves.

**Gary Arrington:** On Friday – November 27<sup>th</sup> 2009, Texas EquuSearch was contacted by another desperate family; asking for our help in finding their missing loved one. Forty-one year old Gary Arrington disappeared after leaving the RCB Club in Eufaula, Oklahoma. After getting off work in Indianola, Oklahoma, Gary drove about twenty minutes to go to meet a friend and drink some beers at the RCB Tavern in a neighboring county. According to many witnesses and video surveillance, Gary did not appear intoxicated. Before leaving the bar, Gary told his friend that he was going to get something to eat and then go home. Gary was scheduled to work at his family's business on Saturday morning. He left the tavern about 1:30 a.m. on November 14<sup>th</sup> 2009 in his dark blue 2002 Ford Ranger pick-up truck (OK rear plate #462-KKF). But he never made it to home -- or work. His was known for being very dependable, so the family became worried when Gary didn't show up for work and reported Gary missing soon afterward. After receiving approval from law enforcement, side-scan sonar specialists Dennis and Tammy Watters traveled to nearby Lake Eufaula because the lake was in the direct path Gary probably would have taken to get back home. Dennis and Tammy searched throughout every accessible area of the lake that Gary could have possibly driven off in to. About 1:50 p.m. on November 10<sup>th</sup> 2009, Dennis called and informed Tim Miller that Gary and his vehicle had been found in a deep dry ravine by a passing truck driver that saw something reflecting in the bushes. The truck driver returned to site of the reflection and found Gary's truck. His remains were found inside. Gary had apparently driven off the road, into the bushes and struck a tree. The tree then fell onto the truck, covering it, making it very difficult for anyone driving by to see it. The only way to see the truck was for a person to walk right up to the bush's edge, and look very hard into

the thicket. This is why Gary's family, his friends or anyone else never saw the truck. The accident scene is about 10 miles from where Gary was last seen more than three weeks earlier in Eufaula, Oklahoma.

**Andrue Jankwitz (Amber Alert):** An "Amber Alert" was issued for 3 year-old Andrue Jankwitz after he was apparently abducted by a male neighbor in Southeast Harris County, Houston, Texas. Thirty-one year old Ricardo Erasmo Hale abducted Andrue on Sunday, November 29<sup>th</sup> 2009 at about 3:30 p.m. Hale also had his own 2 year-old son, Nathaneal Hale, with him when he took Andrue. With the approval from law enforcement, a search began early on Monday – November 30<sup>th</sup> 2009, with our command post set-up at the Sagemont Church in Southeast Houston. Harris County Sheriffs Department detectives were steadily gathering leads and sorting it out -- as numerous pieces of information kept coming in. A phone tip led investigators and searchers into an area where Hale's abandoned truck found, about 15 miles northeast of where Andrue was taken from. Searchers were quickly assigned to saturate that area. Within 25 minutes of locating the suspect's vehicle, detectives arrived, and quickly determined that Andrue, Nathaneal and the suspect, Ricardo Hale, were probably inside of a nearby apartment where the vehicle was located. The detectives entered the apartment and hurriedly scooped-up the children and handed them off two TES members, Alvin Tipps and Smokey Mathers. The detectives then took the suspect into custody. Family members arrived at the scene soon afterward and took both children back to the command post at the Sagemont Church. They were then transported to Texas Children's Hospital in the Texas Medical Center for examination and observation. Except for being dirty, cold and scared, they were found to be O.K. The suspect, Ricardo Erasmo Hale was arraigned and held on \$60,000.00 bond. GOOD WORK GUYS.

**Becky Hamilton:** The family of Becky Hamilton contacted Texas EquuSearch about noon on Sunday – January 3<sup>rd</sup> 2010 and asked for our help in finding Becky because she had vanished after leaving a New Year's Eve party in Huffman, Texas on December 31<sup>st</sup> 2010. All cases are important to us, but this case was especially concerning to Texas EquuSearch -- because Becky's brother, Joe "Tiny" Kazee is a long-time member of the TES family. Our attention quickly peaked when we learned that Becky's vehicle had been found stripped and abandoned in a northeast Houston carwash stall two days after she disappeared. Family members found several of Becky's belongings lying scattered in the stall near the vehicle. The vehicle's stereo was missing. Tim Miller and several other TES members met with Becky's family at the "Tin Cup Sports Bar" in Huffman, Texas. While there, a TES member discovered a substantial amount of dried blood in the parking lot of the bar. On Monday – January 4<sup>th</sup> 2010, searchers met at the First Baptist Church of Huffman and started an immediate and intense search for Becky. Tips came in constantly and each one was quickly given to the detectives. Searchers on ATVs, horses and foot started scouring through fields, woods, lakes and every other imaginable place looking for Becky. The waters near where Becky lived and worked were searched with side-scan sonar. An unmanned aerial photographic drone was used, but nothing significant was found regarding Becky's whereabouts. A Huffman resident even used his personal helicopter to fly a TES searcher into areas where Becky could possibly be. But Becky just was not found. Then some very credible information became available that heightened our interest, and led us into the area of Greens Rd. near the Bush Intercontinental Airport. With the assistance of the Humble Police Department, on Friday morning – January 8<sup>th</sup> 2010, searchers began using the Humble Civic Arena as a command post and staging area. Each team was kept small and door signs were removed so that we would not to attract the attention of any persons in the area that might somehow be involved in Becky's disappearance. Team Leader, Mike "Murph" Murphy and his team were one of the first teams deployed that morning, and they were assigned to search all areas along Greens Rd., east of Hwy 59. Murph had only been in his assigned search area for a few moments, when he called the command post and informed the Search Coordinator that his team had found a small footlocker-type box, with what appeared to be ... red hair coming from one end of the box. Murph was just about 800 feet west of Hwy. 59 and on the northwest corner of the Greens Rd./Hwy 59 intersection. Murph backed his team out of the area by the same path they took when they entered. Tim Miller arrived a few moments later. But after initially looking at the box, Tim and Murph did not feel like it could be Becky because the box was so very small (26"x16"x11"). Tim and Murph (carefully and cautiously so not to disturb any potential evidence), slightly opened the lid of the box and saw the back side of a bloodied head with red hair. They could clearly see though, that there were human remains inside the box. Tim

immediately notified the Harris County Sheriff's Department investigators, and they started driving to his location right away. At almost the same time that Becky's remains were found on Greens Rd., her keys were found next to a dumpster near some woods on FM 1485. This area is several miles north from where she had disappeared and a greater distance from where her remains were eventually found. It was soon learned that the location where the unknown remains were found was actually just inside the jurisdiction of the Houston Police Department. On Sunday evening – January 10<sup>th</sup> 2010, Becky's family was contacted by the Harris County Medical Examiners office. The HCME office notified family members that the remains found two days earlier by TES searchers ... has been confirmed to be those of Becky Hamilton. Less than a week later, investigators with the Harris County Sheriff's Department and the Houston Police Department arrested and charged a suspect with Becky's murder. He is now known to be a 2x convicted sex offender that was listed as "**HIGH**" on the Risk Level for convicted sex offenders. He is currently being held on a two hundred thousand dollar bond. We gratefully appreciate all of the help from everyone that contributed in the search for Becky, including those who drove here from all over Texas, Missouri and Florida to help find her. Thank You for all your help.

**Morton Kendricks:** Seventy Eight year-old Morton Hendricks of St. Paul, Texas disappeared on December 4<sup>th</sup> 2009, after starting out on his daily routine of traveling to the Collin Park area of Lake Lavon in Collin County, Texas. Visiting the park was a part of his normal daily activities before he would go visit go visit a family member in a rehabilitation center in Plano, Texas. It was a routine for him to go visit the family member and have lunch with them. Unfortunately, Morton never made to the Plano rehabilitation center and he wasn't found back at home. No one had seen his 1999 Chevrolet pick-up truck either. Morton never displayed any signs of Dementia or Alzheimer's, but he was prescribed medication for seizures. Law enforcement determined that he hadn't taken his medication for about two weeks. Morton's daughter, Paula Hendricks described her father as the Eveready Bunny because he always kept going, going and going. Texas EquuSearch was called in to help find Morton. Within about thirty minutes of turning on their side-scan sonar equipment, Dennis and Tammy Watters located Morton's remains inside of his vehicle on the bottom of Lake Lavon. It is still unknown what happened to cause this tragedy.

**Robert Lathan:** Forty nine year-old Robert Lathan disappeared after being involved in a traffic accident early on Thursday – January 7<sup>th</sup> 2010 in CLEVELAND, Ohio. His brother was with him when Robert's 1995 Cadillac flipped over near Doan Creek off of I-90. When Robert's brother regained consciousness, Robert was gone. Apparently he was disoriented and had wandered towards the creek – unaware of the icy waters in front of him. Footprints leading from the accident scene to the creek's shore indicated that Robert had somehow ended-up in the icy waters. Also worrying searchers was that Robert didn't show up for his job as a postal worker. Several inches of ice was now covering the creek; making it hard for any kind of recovery efforts. Tim Miller arrived shortly after receiving the call for help. On January 14<sup>th</sup> 2010 -- after two days of wearing ice-water soaked clothing and battling the 11 degree whether, Tim and the other searchers broke ice slabs and located Robert. Robert's funeral was January 25<sup>th</sup> and it was attended by multitudes of friends and relatives.

**Christopher Bonds:** Christopher Bonds disappeared from Corinth, Mississippi on January 8<sup>th</sup> 2010, after having a heated argument with his wife. Bonds made comments to his wife and friends that he was going to harm himself. Not long after he left his home, it was discovered that his pistol was missing from his home. Chris' accounts revealed he had not used his credit cards or gas card when he left in his company vehicle. Chris had also missed several important scheduled appointments, and meetings with clients he served as a pharmaceutical sales representative. His vehicle had no active tracking devices installed. Police used technology to track his cell phone and Ipod to a location near a lake in Savannah, Tennessee. The police searched all areas around the lake, but couldn't find Christopher or his vehicle. Tennessee law enforcement searched the lake with side-scan sonar, but was never able to locate him. At the request of Chris' wife, Dennis and Tammy Watters traveled to Savannah to try and find Chris. After scanning the lake for one day, Dennis and Tammy located Christopher's vehicle with side-scan sonar on Wednesday morning – January 20<sup>th</sup> 2010. Divers recovered his remains several hours later. Good work Tammy and Dennis.

## Reminders:

If you should get a call-out on your phone and didn't understand or receive the complete message, you can call **1-877-698-3261** ... and press 1 to hear the latest call-out message. You will be prompted to enter the phone number you currently have listed on our call-out roster. The message will then be played back to you. When a search call-out is activated, the call-out information will also be posted on the website as soon as possible.

## Special Announcements:

**Nancy Drury:** We are saddened to announce that the mother Texas EquuSearch Board of Director's member, Jim Drury has passed away in Pasadena at the age of 70. Nancy M. Drury passed away on December 1<sup>st</sup> 2009. Nancy was a loving and devoted wife, mother, and grandmother. Nancy was a member of the Eastern Stars, Gulf Meadows Church of God, and Faith Assembly of God. One of her passions was her church work and caring for children. Then later in life as an ordained minister, she loved leading the singles' ministry, and coordinating and performing wedding ceremonies. Nancy's own children were the love of her life. Nancy will be remembered and missed by the many people's lives she has touched. Preceding Nancy in her death was her husband of 36 years James Drury; daughter Pamela Denise Mullins, parents Van Doyle Mercer and Kitty Mercer; her sister Betty Perry; and brothers Raymond Mercer and Buddy Mercer. Nancy is survived by her daughter Dawn Evans and husband Dion Windsor; sons Jim Drury and wife Debbie, and Doyle Drury and his fiancée Leah Daugherty; grandchildren Brian Drury and wife Macy, Bailey Drury Sprott and husband Chris, David Drury, Samantha Drury, Jamie Giles and husband John, Beth Womack and husband Landon, Lacey Reese, and Brian Windsor; great grandchildren Jordan Brooke Drury and Alexis Ryan Sprott; and many close and loving friends. A celebration of Nancy's life was held at 7:00 p.m., Friday, December 4, 2009 in the Fairmont Funeral Home Chapel. Nancy's family asked that in lieu of flowers, for any donations to be made to Texas EquuSearch.

**Darryl Phillips:** One of the most dedicated members of Texas EquuSearch has been enduring an invisible, but agonizing pain for more than 23 years. TES member Darryl Phillips has silently been tormented since his little sister, Angela Phillips, disappeared while riding her bicycle down Calhoun St. in Southeast Houston on September 18<sup>th</sup> 1986. For over 23 years, the Phillips' family's attention would peak when they hear about someone's remains being found in the area. They would drive down the streets, and look at an area, wondering if her remains could be there. Many of those areas were searched thoroughly, but Angela was not found. Not knowing where Angela was, or what happened to her, left a huge void in the lives of the Phillips' family. Angela's mother died a short time after the disappearance. Stress from Angela's disappearance was a major factor in her death. The Phillips' home burned years ago and destroyed almost all pictures of Angela. Darryl joined Texas EquuSearch in early 2000 so that he could help other families that were feeling the same pain as he was. He has helped many people cope with the disappearance of a family member or friend -- because Darryl knows exactly how they feel, and what they are going through. On December 18<sup>th</sup> 2009, Dr. Sharron Derrick of the Harris County Medical Examiner's office contacted the Phillips' family and informed them that Angela might have been identified. The unidentified remains that are thought to be Angela's were actually found a few days after she disappeared in 1986. The remains were found about one mile from where she was last seen riding her bike. But some type of mix-up years ago failed to connect the dots, and Angela went unidentified all this time. That is ... until Dr. Sharon Derrick recently got involved. Dr. Derrick

started researching past unidentified remains' cases. Then she started piecing together and comparing any information she could get on missing persons that disappeared about the time that remains were found. She also started looking through reports of persons missing in the area where the unidentified remains were found. She combed through 23 year-old missing person reports and files that generally fit the description of the unidentified remains. After several days of examination and eliminating almost any other possibilities, Dr. Derrick confidently felt that she had finally identified the 1986 missing Female, Angela Phillips. Because the house fire years earlier had destroyed most photographs of Angela, an aunt near Lufkin did still have one of last reasonably good photos of her. Within just a couple short hours, Mike Stevens of the "East Texas Search & Rescue" traveled to the aunt's home, retrieved the photo and quickly emailed it to Dr. Derrick. The photograph showed specific features of Angela's face that brought Dr. Derrick a big step closer to identifying the remains as those of Angela Phillips. Though some procedures must still be performed for a positive identification, it has given Darryl and his family a sense of resolution that Angela might have been found. We will keep you updated on any information we receive. Texas EquuSearch would like to extend a big "Thank You" to Dr. Sharon Derrick of the Harris County Medical Examiner's Office, Andy Kahan with the City of Houston Crime Victim's Assistance, Mike Stevens, with "East Texas Search & Rescue" and Houston Police Department Investigators with the Missing Person's Division and the Homicide Division.

**Fred Niday:** Fred is a long-time member of the Texas EquuSearch family. Over the last several months, Fred has been in declining health because of problems with his heart and lungs. Fred is pretty much confined to his home now and is unable to drive his vehicle. Fred has helped many families during his time with TES. If you have time to, call Fred and wish him well. He would appreciate your call. He misses being able to come and help on searches. If you can't call Fred, please say a little prayer for him. If you can call him, his telephone number is (281) 489-3721.

**You Asked:** Many people have been asking, "Why hasn't Texas EquuSearch been conducting as many searches as it usually does? There are two reasons. The #1 reason is because donations have dropped off due to the drastically poor economy. Therefore we can't afford to conduct as many searches with such little funds. The #2 reason is that incoming calls for help to find a missing person sometimes just slow down ... which is good. Though there may be thousands of missing person's cases around America, we do not start a search without first being contacted by a member of the missing person's family or law enforcement.

**Training:** Please keep a close eye on our website for training announcements and updates. Even if you have been in for several years, you need to be trained in new techniques, procedures and updated policies.

When a child goes missing, it becomes our highest priority to find him or her. But sometimes searchers don't seem to consider it as serious when they receive a call-out regarding an Alzheimer's or Dementia patient, mentally challenged person or other "special needs" person is goes missing. In most cases, these types of missing person cases are urgent because they are in dire need of required medication. These kinds of cases are urgent because the missing person can't make rational decisions or use their better judgment like you can. Not trying to be derogatory, but a lot of times ... they are a child in an adult's body. They aren't responsible for their condition, disability or their actions. They didn't ask to be that way. But they are. They just can't help it. When we receive a request to help find a missing person that is mentally challenged or has Dementia or Alzheimer's ... we need to take it just as seriously as any other missing person case. Let's say we have a 40 year-old person that is lost - and is mentally disabled with the mental equivalency of a six year-old ... then it's much like having a six year-old child

**missing. So there's a very urgent need to find that person - and bring them home safe. They have family members and friends that love and worry about them too. Let's all try to remember this when we get call-outs for these types of cases.**

We have had to terminate several individuals for violations of EquuSearch's policies, procedures and/or ethics. If anyone is interested in becoming a member, please take a hard look at your reasons for wanting to join. This organization is here to help families of missing loved ones, not to satisfy and personal voids or agendas.

***Final Thought:*** Tim Miller organized Texas EquuSearch ten years ago to help families find their missing loved ones. When Tim's own daughter went missing several years earlier, there were no such teams to help families through this devastating time of their lives. Now, "Search & Recovery" organizations can be found everywhere you look. After ten years, we still don't wear the sharp looking uniforms with a Batman belt full of gadgets and doodads hanging all over our clothes. We don't march around in military-style cadence. But we do have a long list of priceless resources that most teams just don't have. And we have a team of very dedicated searchers that donate their time to go and help families they have never met before. We're not a social club or dating service. Searchers join Texas EquuSearch to help find missing people. And with over 108 deceased finds and hundreds of live people that we located and re-united with their families, that probably makes Texas EquuSearch the most successful "Search & Recovery" team in America. Many of our members joined Texas EquuSearch after we searched for their loved ones. And as you see above in the Becky Hamilton case brief, we sometimes have to search for a family member or friend of the Texas EquuSearch family. The tough economic times have made it extremely difficult for us to survive because it has slowed the public's donations; which we deeply count on to keep operating. Therefore, we can't help near as many families in their search for a missing loved one. But we'll keep operating just as long as we can. When a person goes missing and our phone rings, we'll try to help find the person. All we care about -- is that they are found. You're continued devotion to Texas EquuSearch is one of the main ingredients that make our organization such a success. Thank you all – for what you do, and the big hearts you have.