

Texas EquuSearch Quarterly Newsletter

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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: ALL SEARCHERS should pay very close attention to any thick brushy areas when on any search. It's not unusual for a person or vehicle to enter a thicket of bushes and the green foliage will quickly spring back into its normal place after the person or vehicle goes by. When the foliage springs back into its normal place, it can be very difficult for anyone to see the missing person or vehicle, because it will normally be completely hidden by the foliage. You need to walk up close and take a very concentrated look inside **all** bushes and thickets. If you are on an ATV or horse; then this applies to you also. You need to get off your ATV or horse and search those bushes & thickets too. If you find stacked piles of cut brush, limbs, trash, construction debris, etc., check it in the same manner you would a brushy area of thicket. Break down, thoroughly separate and sort through the piled cut brush, limbs, trash, construction debris, etc. - all the way to the earth's surface. There might be a body, evidence or even a grave at the bottom of the pile. But you won't know until you look. Remember: not all deceased remains give off putrid odors. Some barely have any detectable odor. And buzzards aren't always found circling the remains. So be very attentive to everything.

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:

Peggy Merimon: The skeletal remains of Peggy Merimon were discovered on Saturday - May 8th 2010 in a northwest Lubbock County, Texas field. Peggy was an employee of the Lubbock State School in Lubbock, Texas and was last seen alive on August 9th 2006 as she and her co-worker, Kay Harrelson went to lunch with a man; now identified as Mickey Patterson, another co-worker at the school. Kay Harrelson's remains were found 11 days later about 1 - 2 miles from the school she had left from with Peggy and Patterson. Now Peggy's remains have been discovered 13 miles from where Kay's remains were found. Texas EquuSearch members searched for Peggy Merimon for several days, but unfortunately we weren't able to locate her. Mickey Patterson had already been charged with murder in direct connection to Kay Harrelson's death - and he was to soon stand trial. But since Peggy's remains have now been found and positively identified, Patterson's trial was postponed, and he most likely will face additional Murder charges in Peggy Merimon's death.

Linda Hartsough: In the early morning hours of May 16th 2010, 58 year-old Linda Hartsough decided to walk to a nearby Houston grocery store with a male neighborhood acquaintance. The male later returned to Linda's home alone about 30 minutes later. He claimed he didn't know where Linda was. She never returned. Linda's boyfriend filed a missing person report several days later and contacted TES about six days later. Two days of reconnaissance surrounding the area where Linda was last seen revealed multiple locations that needed to be searched. But even though Linda's family and her boyfriend wanted Texas EquuSearch to activate a search for Linda, investigators with the Houston Police Department's Missing Person Division didn't think they needed our help. So no search was ever activated for Linda. Then ... on Friday - June 25th 2010 at about 6:00 p.m., a man was taking a shortcut through a small clump of trees in a wooded area when he came upon decaying human remains. Homicide & Medical Examiner investigators determined that the remains were those of a petite-framed female in her forties or fifties. The remains were found about 8/10 of a mile from where Linda was last seen at her home. The wooded area where the remains were found - was actually listed at the top of the list, as one of the highest priority locations to be searched ... if one had been activated. The remains were later identified three days later through dental records. They were positively identified as being those of missing female, Linda Hartsough. Houston homicide investigators located and questioned the man whom Linda had gone to the store with. After a skilled homicide investigation, Houston Homicide investigators obtained a confession and have charged the male acquaintance with the murder of Linda Hartsough. The case is currently under investigation.

Robert Rithaler Jr.: Forty-six year-old Robert Rithaler Jr. disappeared from his daughter's home in Newport, Kentucky on May 18th 2010. Robert had undergone extensive brain surgery and had been staying with his daughter while he recuperated. Though some of Robert's medications are unaccounted for, his cell phone, money, watch, wallet with identification and a small notebook he always carried were still at the home. Robert used directions in the notebook to find his way back home when he went walking, because he would get confused

and forget how to get back home. Robert suffers from seizures and has a brain tumor, Epilepsy and Hydrocephalus. Robert has impaired cognitive skills & severe memory loss. Robert was staying with his daughter at the time of the disappearance; so that his wife could continue working and pay the large hospital and medical bills. Robert's therapist has said that Robert would do nothing whatsoever to harm himself. His wife agrees. Four major news stations in nearby Cincinnati, Ohio ran a story about Robert's disappearance, but no one reported seeing Robert. Robert has a very noticeable upside-down, horseshoe-shaped surgical scar on the upper right side of his head, a large scar on his left arm and wrist from recent surgery and he is very bowlegged. Robert's Hydrocephalus gets worse during any hot weather and greatly affects his medical and mental condition. All hospitals and shelters have been contacted, but none have said they've seen Robert. Two area search teams looked for Robert but were unable to locate him. Robert's wife contacted Texas EquuSearch and asked for our help to find him, but the case investigator told Robert's wife that they would not authorize it. The investigator told Robert's wife that she thinks he just decided to leave ... and he'll come back when he's ready. That's unusual, because evidently, with Robert's mental state – he doesn't know how to get back. And with Robert's medical condition being so bad; it seems that the investigator would welcome any kind of help. If Robert is O.K., then why hasn't anyone seen or heard from him?

Taelah Smith: On Saturday – May 22nd 2010, Taelah Smith left her home in Dickinson, Texas with her grand-father, Wilbert Burton to visit his friends in Texas City, Texas. However, later in the day when other family members checked on Taelah, they discovered that Wilbert and Taelah had never arrived at his friend's home. Family members started looking for Taelah & Wilbert, but had no luck in finding them. They were last known to have been in Wilbert's 1995 pick-up truck. It was thought the vehicle would stand-out because it was blue with multiple gray primer spots. The vehicle was also missing its bumper and tailgate. Taelah's family contacted Texas EquuSearch late Sunday evening (May 23rd 2010) and asked for our help in finding her. It was soon learned that Wilbert had contacted family members late Sunday night from a pay phone at the intersection of Beechnut @ Wilcrest Blvd. in Houston Texas. He told the family members that Taelah was O.K. and that he was going to be leaving her at the phone booth for relatives to pick-up. But, when police and family members arrived, Taelah or Wilbert were not at the pay phone. An "Amber Alert" was soon activated. After getting authorization from the lead detective at the Dickinson Police Department, we activated our call-out system for an immediate search. We soon learned from family members that Wilbert was very familiar with the area of Beechnut @ Wilcrest because he used to live within two blocks of there. A Command Post was set-up at the TES office since that was the area the girl might be returned to. A Command Post was also set-up at the "Good News Church" in the 8400 block of Boone Rd. This is about one block from where Taelah had supposedly been left at a phone booth hours earlier. Wilbert was very familiar with the area because he used to live nearby. Information soon became available to us that Wilbert had been making other phone calls from S. Main St. in Houston, Texas. It was thought that Wilbert was trying to make his way back to the Dickinson area by using back-roads. About 10:00 a.m. on Monday – May 24th 2010, Wilbert was driving through Alvin, Texas when his pick-up truck ran out of gas, and he coasted his vehicle into the Living Stones Church in the 1400 block of Victory @ Hwy. 35. Wilbert approached some very observant members / church employees and asked for gas money. The attentive church

members quickly recognized Taelah and Wilbert's vehicle from earlier news reports about Taelah's disappearance. The church members immediately called the Alvin Police Department and Wilbert was quickly taken into custody. Taelah was found to be physically safe, but was transported to the hospital for further medical evaluations. She was returned to other family members soon afterward and the investigation continues.

Angel Fuentes: Twenty four year-old Angel Fuentes drowned on May 30th 2010 in the Trinity River, between Polk & San Jacinto Counties. Witnesses said that Angel was swimming near the end of a boat ramp when he suddenly started struggling and then went under water. He did briefly come up again, but went under for a second time. Witnesses said Angel never came back up again and the friends could not find him in the water. Authorities were notified immediately and search teams began scouring the waters looking for Angel. Law enforcement contacted TES on Sunday – May 31st 2010 and asked for our help in locating Angel. Tim Miller and a team of searchers arrived the next morning and immediately began using the side-scan sonar unit. About three hours later, Angel's body was located and his remains were turned over to law enforcement.

Larry Shaw: Family members and the Hueytown, Alabama Police Department contacted Texas EquuSearch on June 1st 2010 and asked for our help in finding 58 year-old Larry Shaw. They said that Larry had disappeared while visiting relatives on their family farm on May 28th 2010. His vehicle was found still at the farm with some of Larry's belongings inside. Larry was in remission from cancer. Several TES members immediately traveled to Hueytown and started aggressively searching for Larry the next day, on June 2nd 2010. Teams scoured the area woods and fields, while a special operations team searched a nearby stock pond using side-scan sonar. A thorough search of the woods and fields didn't reveal any signs that Larry had been there. Sonar wasn't picking up and distinguishable signs that Larry was in the pond, but Tim Miller felt confident that he was in sizeable stock pond. A decision was made to drain the pond of its water. With the water level in the stock pond drastically lowered, Larry body became visible to searchers and was recovered on June 4th 2010. Locating Larry on sonar was made very difficult because, when located, he was submerged in the vertical position.

Colt Tipton: Law enforcement contacted Texas EquuSearch on June 10th 2010, and asked for our help in locating Colt Tipton after he disappeared from his home in Spring Branch, Texas (Comal County) on Wednesday – June 8th 2010. He was last thought to have walked off into an area of woods near his home. Gene Robinson with RP Flight Systems flew his un-manned drone over the area shortly after we received a call for help. After talking at length with law enforcement, an urgent search call-out was activated for June 11th 2010. TES teams joined with several law enforcement agencies, fire departments, a DPS helicopter and other search groups to find Colt. Searchers combed throughout the area relentlessly looking for Colt while they endured the blistering heat, rugged terrain and avoided poisonous snakes, scorpions and insects. The searchers drugged over several acres of land, but had to temporarily avoid searching one restricted private property. Late that afternoon, it was decided to expand the search the next day, and a call-out for more searchers was issued. On June 12th 2010, about 200

searchers showed up to search for Colt and the search went into NIMS Protocol. The property owner of the restricted property that had not been searched on the day before, gave permission for the land to be searched. About 10:35 a.m., the “Incident Commander” received a call that the air scent K-9 team had found Colt’s deceased remains on the property that was previously restricted from being searched the day before. Colt’s remains were found about 50 yards inside that property line. The TES searchers on the previous day had stopped at the restricted property’s fence line ... as ordered.

Augusta Newmeyer: Twenty-three year-old Augusta Newmeyer drowned around 11:20 p.m. on July 5th 2010 in Lake Conroe, Montgomery County, Texas. She had been on a party barge and went down a sliding board on the deck. After she landed in the water, she swam a short distance and then went under. She never resurfaced and law enforcement was called to help search for her. A helicopter and other search boats were soon assisting in the search for Augusta. The dive team from Montgomery County Pct. 1 Constable’s Department and officers from Texas Parks & Wildlife soon began their missions to find Augusta. Texas EquuSearch was contacted and asked to assist in the search on July 6th 2010. Tim Miller and three other experienced TES volunteers used side-scan sonar to search for Augusta. They searched all day on July 6th 2010, but were not able to locate Augusta. The team started again early on July 7th 2010. They knew they had to find her quick because severe weather was moving in, and that would greatly delay her recovery. Then at 8:49 a.m. on July 7th 2010, the TES members recovered the human remains of a female that fit the same description as Augusta. Positive identification is still pending. The remains were recovered from the same area Augusta had disappeared from. Thanks to all persons and agencies that came out to help find Augusta. Great job guys.

Reminders: Summer has just started, and the temperatures sticking around the mid – high nineties. You need to keep in mind that when you are exerting yourself during strenuous up hill searches or through muggy woods with no air circulation; that you must keep yourself well hydrated. Drink as many fluids as you can. Wear cool clothing. And if you feel weak or sick, notify your team leader immediately. That is absolutely nothing to be embarrassed about. Keep an eye on your fellow searchers. If they start to look like the heat could be affecting them, notify your team leader immediately. If you feel you need to stop and take a rest, tell you team leader. It’s smarter to rest and be safe ... than it is to keep pushing-on, and get sick. Be very cautious and look where you preparing to step, because of a snake might be sitting there. It’s best to have a long, but lightweight stick so that you can probe into an area before walking into it. Snakes can easily blend into the color of the surrounding environment.

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.

POLICY REGARDING UNAUTHORIZED SEARCHES AND/OR DUAL MEMBERSHIP

Texas EquuSearch (“TES”) is a nationally recognized and respected, search and recovery organization. Membership in TES is an honor and a privilege.

TES may authorize “mutual aid” to assist law enforcement, governmental agencies or other search organizations upon request by such agencies or families. Individual TES members are prohibited from acting on behalf of TES, or as an independent searcher on an unauthorized search.

TES members are not allowed to hold dual memberships in other search and recovery organizations. This does not include CERT or fire departments, etc.

An unauthorized search constitutes a liability due to unauthorized use of the TES logo, as well as potential litigation brought against participating teams. Additionally, unauthorized searches tie up valuable resources.

We are proud of the dedication of TES members and ask for your continued support.

Special Announcement:

Long-time Texas EquuSearch member, **Mike “Odie” Odenwalder** and Michelle McEntire exchanged vows of marriage in a private ceremony on Friday – July 2nd 2010 in Lake Jackson, Texas. We hope Odie and Michelle have many, many years of happiness in their journey through married life.

You Asked: *Are the Orientation & Training Classes for new members only?* No, they are for all members of the Texas EquuSearch organization. Each class details newly implemented search techniques that all members need to be familiarized with, as well as important news updates, policies and procedures. Sometimes we are honored with guest special speakers from various law enforcement jurisdictions. We have hands-on, simulated searches that give you the knowledge of what to expect on future searches. So it doesn't matter if you've been a member for 10 years, or 10 days – you need to attend one of our training classes and see what's new.

On An Interesting Note: Long-time Texas EquuSearch member, Nancy Smith is the proud mother of twin nine year-old boys. And she has good reason to be proud. Nancy's boys have watched her being so involved with Texas EquuSearch over the last several years; that they too feel they are destined to become members of our search team. That's because; instead of playing little boy games like “Cops & Robbers” or “Cowboys & Indians”, Nancy's sons pretend to be members of the Texas EquuSearch team looking for a missing person. They will scour through fields

and lots imitating our members on a search. They even simulate someone being found, and the proper steps they should take. We're sure we'll be seeing them on our team and searching for missing people in about nine years. We look forward to having them too.

Training: Texas Equusearch Mounted Search and Recovery New Member Orientation and Training will be held Saturday, September 25, 2010, at the Bass Pro Shop in Pearland, Texas. The orientation and training is from 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. in the upstairs conference room. The afternoon portion will be a field exercise, so please wear appropriate search clothing and shoes. Class sizes are limited.

To register, contact Sherry McKinney at sherry.mckinney@texasequusearch.org.

Bass Pro Shop
1000 Basspro Drive
Pearland, TX 77047
Phone: (713) 770-5100

Sometimes, things get a little slow and there isn't many calls coming in that requires an immediate search activation. Though you have trained and just might be a little antsy or anxious to put your new skills to work, it's really good when we don't get a lot of urgent calls. Just think of it this way. When we don't get those calls, that means the family and friends of someone isn't worried into sickness, having sleepless nights and desperately seeking help to find their loved one. It also means that a missing person could be out somewhere sick, confused, hungry, lost, injured or deceased. And certain procedures must be followed before any search can be activated. So sit back & relax. It might be an hour after you read this, maybe a day or possibly a week. But the call will come. We'll see you then.

Final Thought: A little over five years ago, Natalie Holloway traveled to the island of Aruba with several friends from her high school to celebrate their graduation. Near the end of her visit, she mysteriously disappeared on May 30th 2005. Several men were questioned regarding Natalee's disappearance, but an investigation finally determined that Natalee was last known to have been with a young man identified as Joran van der Sloot. Natalee and Joran had met each other at a local casino. But there was no cooperation from Joran van der Sloot. All he did was tell lies; continually changing his story. The investigation into Natalee's disappearance was greatly hampered because Joran's father was a judge and carried considerable influence on the island of Aruba. Joran was jailed during the investigation, but amazingly released a short time later. He taunted investigators, searchers and the media with false and misleading information. But worst of all; he yanked at the delicate emotions of all Natalee's distraught family. Millions of dollars and thousands of hours of search time was dedicated to finding Natalee. Unfortunately, Natalee's remains have not been found **yet**. Joran traveled frequently over the last five years; never showing any kind of remorse for causing Natalee's death. Frequent video shots show him smiling

and acting care-free everywhere he went. Days, weeks, months and years went by without any progress of finding justice for Natalee until a few months ago when Joran tried to blackmail Beth Holloway out of \$250,000 in exchange for information leading to Natalee's whereabouts. The F.B.I. had actually tried to set-up a sting for Joran, but he somehow slipped away undetected.

On May 30th 2010, exactly five years to the day after Natalee mysteriously disappeared, Joran became the prime, and only suspect in the vicious homicidal death of 21 year-old Stephany Flores Ramirez at a hotel in Lima, Peru. They both had been attending a poker tournament at a local casino. The evidence against Joran is blistering and overwhelming. He gave a full confession on video, but several days later, he recanted on the confession claiming "intimidation from Peruvian law authorities." That's strange because news videos clearly show he was not intimidated, and that he kind of braggingly told of how he committed the murder of Stephany. Joran might have been in prison long ago, and Natalee might have been buried near her family in Alabama had the Aruban authorities tried as hard to solve Natalee's case, as the Peruvian authorities did to solve Stephany Ramirez's murder. And Stephany would still be alive today. Joran can't count on his father's help anymore because his father died suddenly several months ago. Peru has a judicial system that is somewhat comparable to the courts in the United States, but they are still much harsher than our system on a criminal's punishment. The only thing Joran regrets today is getting caught. His life in a Peruvian prison won't be a walk through Neverland. He will be living among hardened criminals serving time for other vicious crimes. Some are psychologically demented. Rapist will have their way with him. As long as Joran is in a Peruvian prison, every night is date night. He will lie awake at nights wondering which convict is going to be the next to harm him and he surely won't be liked there. Tim Miller recently spent two weeks in Aruba looking for Natalee and trying to get more information that might lead searchers to her.