



# PROJECT LIFESAVER

INTERNATIONAL, INC.

*A Not-For-Profit Organization Serving  
Sheriff, Police, Fire, Public Safety and  
Search & Rescue Teams Nationwide*



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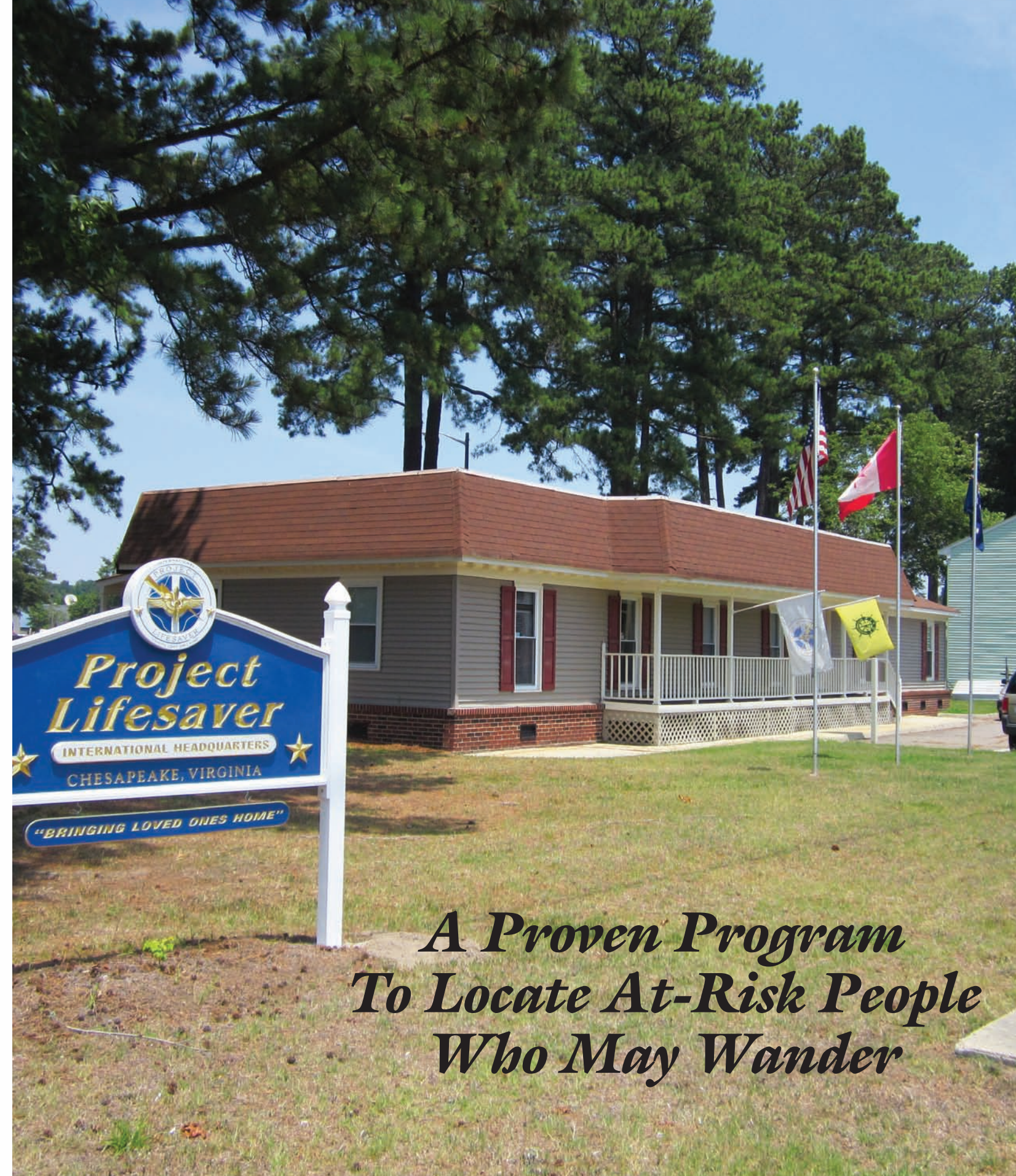
[www.projectlifesaver.org](http://www.projectlifesaver.org)

*"Guardians of Alzheimer's, Autism, and Special Needs Wanderers"*



Gene Saunders  
Project Lifesaver, CEO

[www.projectlifesaver.org](http://www.projectlifesaver.org)



***A Proven Program  
To Locate At-Risk People  
Who May Wander***

*In Partnership with Law Enforcement*





# Missing and Wandering Children with Autism and Down Syndrome: The Project Lifesaver Partnership Meets the Challenge

By **Chief J.E. “Gene” Saunders**, Chief Executive Officer, Project Lifesaver International

## The Need

In Washington State, a County Sheriff’s Office received a call about a missing 11-year-old autistic boy. He did not board his camp bus and ran from the driver and teacher across the school grounds. The school is situated in a rural area with heavily wooded surroundings and a major state highway nearby.

Fortunately, the boy was wearing a Project Lifesaver wristband transmitter, and a specially trained response team went into action. The boy was seen riding his bike along the state highway and the team picked up his signal about a half a mile from the sighted location.

The team found the boy hiding under a thicket of blackberry bushes alongside a creek in a wooded area. He was soaking wet and in the early stages of hypothermia. He was turned over to Police and taken home.

This lucky boy was located in just 15 minutes after the Project Lifesaver response team arrived in the area. It was one of nearly 2500 rescues Project Lifesaver has achieved since its founding in 1999, but we want to do more, especially for the many thousands of children at risk.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta released figures showing the alarming prevalence of autism in this country, with about 1 in 100 school aged children having an autism diagnosis. Add to that the estimated 6,000 children with Down syndrome are born in the U.S. each year.

These children often are fearless in wandering to new places, and can be unaware of their surroundings and the dangers involved. They can be attracted to water sources such as pools, ponds, rivers and lakes; drowning is a leading cause of death for children with these afflictions. They have limited abilities to communicate with other people, and in addition to the dangers of their environment, abduction is another critical threat. There are too many children that remain unprotected, and too many horror stories associated with these children as well as adults who suffer from these afflictions.

## The Solution

To meet the challenges of the critical emergencies presented by the missing and wandering, Project Lifesaver, which was founded by the 43rd Virginia Search Rescue in 1999, employs a comprehensive rapid-response support system integrating

the most reliable locator equipment with specially trained search and rescue teams from local public safety agencies. Known internationally for the pioneering program which has been extremely effective in locating Alzheimer’s patients, Project Lifesaver is now proud to manage the world’s leading system for the search and rescue of wandering victims of Autism, Down Syndrome as well as Alzheimer’s and *all* related mental disabilities for people of *all* ages.

Project Lifesaver is local. It is all about people and partnerships formed in hundreds of communities throughout the United States. The focus is on communities where law enforcement, civic groups, local business and caregivers join in developing and strengthening all aspects of the program including rescues, education and fundraising so that families can have the protection, and peace of mind that Project Lifesaver provides.

Members of the Project Lifesaver team are specially trained, not only in use of the electronic tracking equipment, but especially in the methods to communicate with a person who has these special needs. Locating the individual is only part of the mission. The person who is located will be disoriented, anxious, and untrusting.

The Project Lifesaver team knows how to approach the person, gain their trust and put them at ease for the trip back home.

## The Technology

People who are enrolled in the Project Lifesaver program wear a personalized wristband that emits a tracking signal on an individually assigned FM radio frequency. When caregivers notify the local Project Lifesaver agency that the person is missing, a search and rescue team responds to the wanderer’s area and starts searching with the mobile locator tracking system. Search times have been reduced from hours and days to just minutes, and the costs of a typical search drop to a very small fraction of a standard operation.

The Project Lifesaver wristband is much more than a passive ID bracelet. It is a one-ounce battery-operated radio wrist transmitter with a 30+ day battery life that emits an automatic tracking signal every second, 24 hours a day. The signal is tracked on the ground or in the air over several miles. As each wristband has a unique radio frequency, the Project Lifesaver search team positively locates and identifies the person who has wandered away from home or a care facility.

The basic radio frequency technology has proven itself time and again to be the most reliable. Locator systems that rely solely on GPS, are not as reliable. Anything that can block sunlight can block GPS signals. This raises the question of whether GPS, as a stand-alone system, is acceptable in locating a missing and wandering person who may be in, or next to a building, under a tree, in the brush, under a bridge, in a vehicle or has fallen down and has their

GPS unit covered by their own body. These GPS systems are also dependent on the reliability of battery power, AC power, computers, internet connections, standard telephone service, cell phone service and the skill level of their operators in order to locate and rescue the missing and wandering. Any failure in any one of these components can possibly result in a total failure of the entire system.

Project Lifesaver’s 2470 rescues nationwide and a 100% success rate prove the point that radio frequency technology is the most effective.

## The Success

Starting in 1999 with just four jurisdictions in the program, the need for these critical rescue missions has been met with rapid growth over the past twelve years. By the end of 2011, Project Lifesaver will be protecting people in more than 1150 communities in 46 states throughout the USA. Project Lifesaver is now in 4 provinces in Canada, and is now in Australia. Inquiries from public safety and health authorities around the world come into our headquarters every month.

Within nearly 2500 rescues, the average elapsed time to locate the missing person is under 30 minutes. Those statistics speak for themselves. But the number of lives saved, the sense of security and peace of mind for families and caregivers cannot easily be measured. Let’s also not forget the sparing of our communities’ valuable financial and manpower resources. There are scores of Sheriff’s who will speak about the effectiveness of the program and the enormous satisfaction their department and their community feels in having accomplished a rescue, possibly

saving a life and sparing a family from the worst of their nightmares: a missing and wandering loved one.

It is this partnership with public safety agencies that is the key to our success. No other organizations can handle this mission as effectively. Public Safety Departments have the focus, the training, the discipline, the community support, and above all, an insight into the essential need to protect these people. In recognition of this partnership, Project Lifesaver has received the enthusiastic endorsement of the National Sheriff’s Association, the International Society of Crime Prevention Practitioners, several statewide Sheriff’s associations as well as the Alzheimer’s Association of America, the National Council of Certified Dementia Practitioners, and many other national and international healthcare, community service and public safety organizations.

## The Future

The unfortunate facts are that Autism, Down syndrome, Alzheimer’s disease and related disorders are with us in every community, and the numbers are growing. Project Lifesaver was born out of the need to put an end to the tragedies of the missing and wandering and we express our sincere gratitude for the support of the Sheriff’s Departments, Police Departments, Fire Departments and Search and Rescue Organizations, VA Hospitals, and even nursing homes that have joined us in this commitment. Together we have worked very hard to become a part of an extraordinary success story in providing protection to those who need it most.

*Chief Gene Saunders is a retired Police Captain with 33 years of service in law enforcement and public safety. He is a recognized authority in Search and Rescue (SAR) and has participated in numerous rescue operations for missing children. He has received many awards and decorations from several law enforcement and public safety organizations and has directed hundreds of SAR missions for missing persons, downed aircraft, disaster relief, and humanitarian assistance. As a leading national advocate for the protection of missing and wandering victims of Alzheimers and related dementia, Chief Saunders was selected as a delegate to the 2005 White House Conference on Aging.*

