

Silver Street Surfers

By Reg P. Wydeven
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When I was a kid, I loved to read Spiderman comic books. Spidey always had to stop cool villains: the Green Goblin, Dr. Octopus and the Rhino. Some of his enemies, however, weren't quite as awesome.

Take, for example, Raul Chalmers, also known as the Black Fox. A career cat burglar, the Black Fox robbed jewelry stores, museums, and mansions looking for valuables.

The Black Fox had no super powers and no flashy costume, so he was a pretty lame nemesis. He wasn't a great thief either, as he was always looking for that last "big score" so he could retire. It never happened, so he kept stealing until he was a senior citizen.

Mockingly, Spidey referred to him as the "Silver Fox," a nod to his graying hair resulting from his advanced age. While the Silver Fox had a nice ring to it, Chalmers knew it was a jab at his elder status.

In much the same way, the new Silver Alert program has a nice ring to it, even though it's coined for a serious concern – lost or disoriented seniors. Silver Alert is similar to Amber Alert, which authorities use to inform the public about missing children by interrupting television and radio programs and displaying the information on electronic highway signs. Silver alert is currently available in 12 states, including the heavily senior-populated Florida, which has issued 28 alerts since launching its program in October.

The National Silver Alert Act, which would spread the program across the entire country, is presently awaiting approval by the Senate. The Act was introduced to address our nation's aging population. According to the Alzheimer's Association, about 5.2 million people in the United States live with Alzheimer's.

While the protocol for activating a Silver Alert varies in each of the 12 states that currently issue the alerts, most require local law enforcement to confirm that the missing person is a danger to himself or others and that the individual suffers from some sort of dementia before issuing the alert. In addition, Ohio, for example, also requires families to provide sufficient information that will help the public identify the missing person, who must be at least 65. Such information includes a make or model of a car the older person might have been driving.

In North Carolina, however, the age limit is much lower. So long as the missing person has a verified developmental disability, a Silver Alert may be issued even if the missing individual is as young as 18. Florida issues Alerts for people age 60 or older who have clearly indicated that they have an irreversible deterioration of intellectual faculties, or for any adult that shows signs of dementia and a lack of capacity to form consent.

Opponents of the Silver Alert Act claim the warning results in too many alerts for the public to remember, thus reducing their effectiveness. Backers of the Act, however, cite that of the 28 Silver Alerts issued in Florida since October, all but one have resulted in finding the senior alive.

All I know is that if it was my grandma that was missing, I would sure want everyone in the world looking for her.