

Missing and Endangered Persons Information
Clearinghouse Advisory Board

MISSING & ENDANGERED

Spring 2021
Issue 3

Missing and Endangered Persons Information
Clearinghouse Advisory Board
2331 Phillips Road
Tallahassee, FL 32308

www.fdle.state.fl.us/mcicsearch/AdvisoryBoard.asp

IN 2020, THERE WERE:

19 AMBER Alerts with EIGHTEEN Recoveries

33 Missing Child Alerts with THIRTY Recoveries

249 Silver Alerts with TWO HUNDRED FOURTY-SEVEN Recoveries

38 RECOVERIES WERE DIRECTLY ATTRIBUTED TO THE FLORIDA ALERT SYSTEM

What is MEPICAB?

The Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE) Missing Endangered Persons Information Clearinghouse Advisory Board (MEPICAB) was created in 1996 to address issues dealing with Florida's missing children. The MEPICAB is a diverse mix of law enforcement officials, victims' parents, government agencies, missing children non-profit organizations, and community members interested in missing children issues.

The Missing Endangered Persons Information Clearinghouse Advisory Board's mission is to support awareness, education, and training for the prevention, response, and recovery of missing and endangered persons.

The Advisory Board meets quarterly to discuss and implement plans and policies to combat and create an awareness of the large number of children that go missing every year. Board members are chosen by FDLE's Commissioner from around the state to provide a balanced representation of Florida.

Want to support Florida Missing Children's Day?

Florida Missing Children's Day (FMCD) is an annual ceremony that will be held on September 13, 2021, to honor the families of missing children as well as law enforcement officers and citizens who have made significant contributions protecting Florida's citizens.

Any person, business, or agency interested in donating to the Florida Missing Children's Day Foundation for 2021 can visit the FMCD Foundation website.





Remembering Diana Alvarez

Diana Alvarez was last seen on May 29, 2016, in Fort Myers, Florida, and a Florida Amber Alert was issued. In 2020, her remains were found in a wooded area in Osceola County. Jorge Guerrero-Torres was charged with first-degree murder in Diana Alvarez's case and is awaiting trial. He is currently incarcerated due to a prior conviction.

A Grieving Mother

Statements by Ms. Rita Hernandez, mother of Diana Alvarez, via translator

Diana Alvarez went missing in May 2016, at 9 years of age. Her disappearance forever changed the lives of many, especially her family, who continued to search for her. Rita Hernandez, Diana Alvarez's mother, had no reason to suspect that the family's act of kindness to a previous family friend would lead to Diana's death when they offered Jorge Guerrero-Torres a room to rent. Guerrero-Torres would go on to kidnap Diana Alvarez, sexually abuse her, and murder her in 2016.

Ms. Hernandez and her family would receive an outpouring of support from the Fort Myers community and Florida Missing Children's Day (FMCD) annual ceremony. The Fort Myers community (especially her neighbors) worked day and night looking for Diana. They provided the family with food and support. In 2018, Ms. Hernandez was introduced to the FMCD annual ceremony and participated in the event that year. Ms. Hernandez feels that FMCD helps deal with the pain of Diana's passing and provides connections to other families that are also going through similar circumstances. FMCD provided her the opportunity to make friends who would meet regularly and support each other.

Additionally, Ms. Hernandez feels that her children benefit through the friendships and support received from other children in similar situations. According to Ms. Hernandez, FMCD's ceremony brings awareness to the tragedy of missing children and teaches families about potential danger awareness. She appreciates FMCD for allowing families to remember and celebrate all of the missing children that may have been forgotten and for the children that had their lives cut short due to tragedy. Ms. Hernandez and her family consider FMCD to be a big event for them and other families because it allows them to find the support they need to continue living after the tragic loss of a child.



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The Legacy of Don Ryce

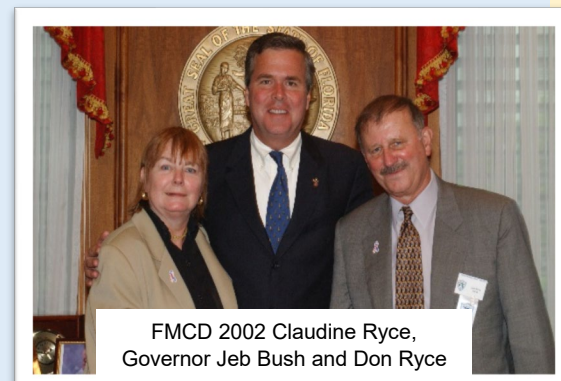
By Mary Coffee

I jumped at the opportunity, when the MEPICAB unanimously agreed to include an article in memory of Don Ryce, to honor the man with whom I was fortunate to work for nearly 25 years. I knew more than enough of his story and accomplishments deserving to be shared with the world. However, when it came time to put fingertips to the keyboard, the task became a vertical glacier towering over me, impossible to climb. How could I sufficiently honor the only man I have ever called "my hero?"

To be clear, Don Ryce is not my idol and was not a perfect human. In his genuine humbleness, he would quickly correct anyone who chose to describe him as such. Don Ryce is my hero because in the immediate wake of experiencing a parent's nightmare that began for him on September 11, 1995, and was so horrific I cannot allow myself to even imagine it, let alone envision surviving it, Don turned it all: the anxiety, desperation, loss, pain, grief, anger, and anguish; into determined care and service, making lasting change from his passion to make our world a safer place for our children. Make it safer than it was for his youngest son, 9-year-old Jimmy. Don did survive and he continued. He thrived. He fortified himself, his marriage, and his family, and he expanded his mission in life, for the rest of his life. He survived to "...prevent these atrocities and (to urge all of us) (to) be willing to do what it takes to protect our kids." Seven months to the day after Jimmy's abduction, and only 3 months after Jimmy's remains were found, Don and his beloved wife, Claudine, were already changing their residence to better support the work of the newly founded Jimmy Ryce Center in Miami Beach scheduled to launch within the coming month. They both also enthusiastically accepted the invitation to participate as members of Florida's Missing Children Information Clearinghouse Advisory Board (MCICAB), now MEPICAB, the first in the nation.

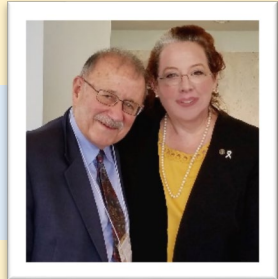
The Jimmy Ryce Center's first mission was to support parents in the recovery of their children abducted by predators, by building a network of law enforcement and, eventually, other clearinghouses across the country. Don and Claudine were enthusiastic and productive participants on MEPICAB, both serving as members and officers on the board for the rest of their lives.

Don Ryce served as the inaugural Chairperson in 1996, as both sitting and acting Chairperson of the Board over multiple periods, and was Chairperson Emeritus at the time of his death in October 2020. In addition to the Ryce Center and the MEPICAB, together, the Ryces more than endured, they supported, created, and launched numerous statewide and national initiatives including a program to breed and train bloodhounds and donate them to law enforcement agencies around the country to give abducted children the very best chance to be quickly and safely recovered; a nationwide network of resources and experts ready to respond and join in a search or the development of new policy and laws; Florida's Jimmy Ryce Civil Commitment Act, laws that examine and evaluate those convicted of horrific sexual and sexually motivated crimes and create a statewide process merging the efforts of corrections, judicial, and mental health services to identify those with a great level of risk of reoffending, ensuring they have access to appropriate treatment and have no access to those they would seek to harm.



FMCD 2002 Claudine Ryce,
Governor Jeb Bush and Don Ryce

Don Ryce - Remembering the Man By Mary Coffee



Don's passionate work contributed to the reality of each of our lives and the lives of all children. Don's tenacious advocacy continued through many other challenges including the sudden loss of Claudine, his life's partner in love, marriage, parenthood, profession, advocacy, and trailblazing; the loss of his daughter, Martha, to suicide 5 years later; and the progressive loss of his health.

In the wake of our loss of Don Ryce from this world, I wonder how can I best remember and honor the true and unexaggerated legacy of a man who made everything good he could out of the most soul-shredding circumstances any of us could imagine. And to this, I look to my friend, Don, and remember his quiet, persistent, passionate, demonstrative love for the life and memory of his child, his wife, daughter, and son, and every child and parent everywhere, today and in years to come. I remember his efforts to find every missing child, to support every searching parent, to equip and train every law enforcement officer, and to prevent every would-be predator from ever inflicting the sort of pain, grief, and loss he and Jimmy had endured.

It may be that I never have the honor of meeting and working with another person like my hero, Don Ryce, but I hope I do. I hope we all do until there is no longer a need for their leadership and passion.

To help me keep Don's heroic efforts at work, please consider visiting the [Jimmy Ryce Center](#) webpage, you will be glad you did.

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Protecting Our Most Vulnerable- Our Children

The Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE) formed the Florida Computer Crime Center in 1998 to provide investigative support, training, and advanced computer forensic services for computer related crimes. As a result of the increased volume of computer crime, FDLE eventually expanded by creating a Cyber/High-Tech Crime Unit at each of FDLE's seven regional offices and also a Cyber/High-Tech Crime Office which is located at FDLE headquarters. Each of these units perform an essential role in achieving our state's cybersecurity objectives by investigating a wide range of cybercrimes, from computer network disruption and intellectual theft to domestic state sponsored attacks, and apprehending and prosecuting those responsible. One of the focus areas of the Cyber/High-Tech Crime Units is the investigation of Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC).

Child exploitation is one of the most reprehensible and destructive offenses confronting our world today. It harms the safety and well-being of our young people; it devastates our families and communities; and it degrades our strength as a nation of laws and civic security. No matter what form child exploitation takes—from the creation and circulation of child pornography to the trafficking of children for sex—it demands the full attention of law enforcement, policymakers, community leaders, and service providers, each of whom plays an essential role in combating this unconscionable crime.

Investigating and prosecuting child exploitation crimes is a priority for all those involved and FDLE's Cyber/High-Tech Crime Units around the state work tirelessly to protect children from exploitation by predators who are involved in the travel internationally to engage in illicit sexual conduct with minors. FDLE's Cyber/High-Tech Crime Units utilize the latest technology and techniques to collect evidence and track the activities of individuals and organized groups who sexually exploit children using the dark web, chat rooms, peer-to-peer trading and other internet-based platforms with the goal of helping reduce child exploitation, and prevent child victimization.

2020 OVERALL MISSING AND ENDANGERED PERSONS STATISTICS

As of 12/31/2020, there were 24,287 active Florida missing CHILDREN cases open. At the end of 2019, there were 26,099 active cases open.

As of 12/31/2020, there were 11,234 active Florida missing ADULT cases open. At the end of 2019, there were 11,600 active cases open.

**2019 Statistics show that 81.6% of missing persons are recovered within the same month.
12% of missing persons are recovered within one month.
Less than 1% of missing persons are not recovered by one year.**

MISSING & ENDANGERED

Remembering Tiffany Sessions Never Give Up!

By Hilary Sessions

Tiffany Sessions disappeared without a trace on an afternoon walk from Gainesville, Florida, thirty-two years ago on Thursday February 9, 1989. After several hours, Tiffany's roommate reported Tiffany missing to her mother, Hilary Sessions. Ms. Sessions initially contacted law enforcement; however, there was no crime scene, and law enforcement saw no reason to get involved.

Ms. Session's world turned upside down when Tiffany went missing. She had no idea how to continue the search for her daughter without law enforcement's help. However, the Sessions family would not give up and started an organized personal search for Tiffany with friends and volunteers. A week later, over 1,000 military recruits were out searching the Gainesville area. In a world before computers and the internet, the Sessions would personally distribute over a million flyers worldwide through business suppliers and other contacts. Ms. Sessions became personally involved in the search and has closely followed any leads in Tiffany's disappearance. Ms. Sessions investigated every lead for 25+ years.

Former Sheriff Sadie Darnell hired a new cold-case detective, Kevin Allen, to take up the case. Communication with Ms. Sessions and the Alachua County Sheriff's Office became regular to continue Tiffany's search effort. The county's evidence locker was searched for any additional evidence that could be used with improved technology. Biological evidence was obtained from another cold homicide case within a mile and a half of where Tiffany was last seen. The biological evidence was matched with a possible suspect that was incarcerated on other charges. Unfortunately, by the time the possible subject was located, the suspect's health was too poor to be questioned, and he passed away. However, possible evidence was obtained through his personal effects and indicated that the suspect may have been a serial killer.

Evidence showed possible links between Tiffany's disappearance and other homicides. An evidence search was conducted using the latest information and drawing parallels from the other homicides to locate Tiffany. However, she has not been located yet. Ms. Sessions continues her efforts in finding Tiffany and putting Tiffany to rest. Ms. Sessions will keep searching until she can no longer continue, stating that she "will NEVER give up!" The search continues. If you have any information about this case, please contact Detective Kevin Allen at the Alachua County Sheriff's Office by calling (352) 367-4000.



Online Child Safety Tips

In 2020, a total of **194** ICAC related cases were worked by FDLE's regional offices and there were **119** arrests made in ICAC cyber related cases.

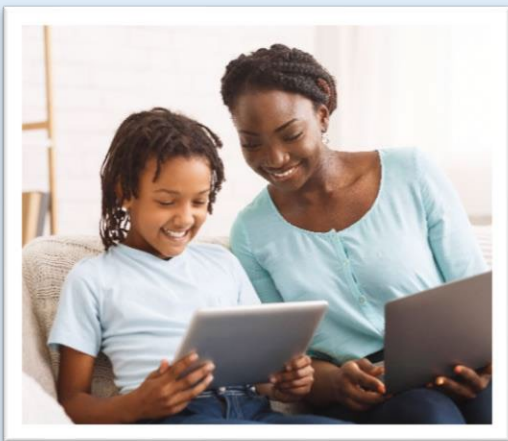
Along with their local, state and federal law enforcement partners, the FDLE Cyber/High-Tech Crime Units are committed to keeping our children safe and they are dedicated to working every day to protect not only the children of Florida but children everywhere.

Here are just a few "Best Practices for Parents" to help keep your children safe online.

- ✚ Create rules for Internet use in the home. Set guidelines for how and when your child can use their electronic devices. Make rules about the amount of time they can spend on devices, the apps and games they are allowed to play and when they can use their devices. Remember that your child could be interacting with strangers through gaming consoles, phone apps and social media accounts.



- ✚ Routinely check social media accounts and check Internet history on computers and devices to see which sites your child is visiting. Keep in touch on social media to see who their friends are and what content they are interacting with.



- ✚ Use the Internet with your kids. Spend time letting your children show you what they do online. Have discussions about what to do if they find content that they find questionable or uncomfortable.
- ✚ Keep an open line of communication with your child so that they know they can come to you about the situations they face without fear of punishment.

For information on keeping your children safe online, please visit the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) and the Secure Florida links below.

<https://www.missingkids.org/theissues>

www.secureflorida.org