



PHOTO BY SALENA DE LA CRUZ / Clackamas Print

Above: This billboard is located off Highway 213 and was put up during the week of March 25, and is one of two that was donated to help the authorities find Miranda Gaddis and Ashley Pond who disappeared under similar circumstances. The community has worked together since the disappearance of these two girls and raised more than \$75,000 to continue search efforts and money to help the families with their bills.

Community helps families of missing girls

SALENA DE LA CRUZ

Design Editor

It's been nearly three months since Ashley Pond disappeared and over a month since Miranda Gaddis vanished under similar circumstances. Today they are still missing, but with the media, families and communities rallying for support and pleading for help, the authorities hope to bring the girls home. They are looking at every lead hoping to find the one that shows the way to the missing girls.

This story and the similarity of circumstances has received nationwide media coverage, from the nationally acclaimed TV show "America's Most Wanted" to "Larry King Live;" "America's Most Wanted" has aired five segments on the missing Oregon City girls and plans to continue airing it. John Walsh, the show's host, was in similar circumstances in 1980 when his six-year-old son was abducted from a department store and was later found murdered. The authorities and the families hope the extensive media coverage will persuade whoever took the girls to bring them home.

Police have been sifting through over 2,500 tips with maybe "one solid lead" over the past few months, according to Beth Anne Steele, spokesperson for the F.B.I. Search dogs have been leading, but again, no leads. Two billboards worth nearly \$250,000 were donated by a local company; one is located on Highway 213 northbound at Beavercreek Road, the other on Interstate 205 at the Park Place exit.

"They have had a lot of tips, but they haven't been panning out,"

said Michelle Duffey, Miranda's mother.

Since the search has begun, nearly \$75,000 has been raised to help support the cause and \$3,700 of that has been put aside for the families as an emergency fund. Both mothers have stopped working during the search for their daughters. Duffey has used some of the fund for her bills, while Lori Pond, Ashley's mother, has kept her portion untouched in case her daughter calls, and she needs to hop on a plane to get her.

The community has banded together but is terrified at the same time. Parents are trying to keep their children safe while helping to find the ones who were taken. They are rallying to support a law called the Parent Notification Law. It would require school officials to notify parents or guardians at work or home when their children are not there. It is believed crucial moments could have been saved had both mothers been notified their girls were absent.

Ashley's mother would like to plead with the person who took her daughter and Miranda. She believes that the person responsible is very sick and she would like them to get help, but they need to bring the two girls home.

"...As Ashley's mother, I'd like to say (to) this person that has the girls, for one, he needs to return them. For two, when he does, there is help out there for people like him...obviously someone who would do something like this is really sick," said Pond. "We, Michelle and I, both want these girls back safe."

Duffey's concerns continue to escalate since her daughter's disappearance on March 5. She thinks of her daughter's allergies

and whether or not she is getting the appropriate medicine.

"I know Miranda is really sick right now because she has allergies really, really bad, and she's usually at the doctor's a lot. She's allergic to two medicines and if someone has them and is keeping them, I don't want them to give her medicine she is allergic to. She is allergic to Sulfa and Sefla," said Duffey.

Pond offers advice on how to keep children safe and how this situation could have been avoided. She said that "...maybe if we had an organization of some type to get together to organize a neighborhood watch or block houses, then maybe we could know who's who...and then maybe we could all watch out," said Pond. She had told her daughter to always use the buddy system. However, on both those days the girls' buddies weren't around to walk with them to their bus stops.

"It's kind of interesting that when both Miranda and Ashley disappeared there were a lot of girls that weren't there at the bus stop, that normally walked with the girls," said Pond. "Whoever took these girls had to have known that—had to have been watching."

On April 5, the Oregon City Albertsons hosted an ice cream social, selling root beer floats and holding a raffle to raise more money to help search for the missing girls. By late afternoon, they had already earned more than \$2,000. A rummage sale will be held April 13 and 14 at the Oregon City Armory to raise more funding for the search.

"Everyone is really pulling together as a community...everything that they

are doing is wonderful. We give them the ball and they go rolling with it. Just like today, it shows such a wonderful community we have," said Pond.

Though Duffey doesn't blame the apartment's management for her daughter's disappearance, upon Miranda's return she plans to move completely out of the area. She doesn't even stay in her own apartment because it's too uncomfortable for her without Miranda. She does still have two daughters with her, Mariah and Marissa, and her son Jason, who is with relatives right now. She does think, however, that no one would try anything now because of the amount of security and people on high alert.

"I'll probably move out of the area—it's just too many bad memories, and I think Miranda would have a hard time being

there," said Duffey.

Everyday, work is being done, but the leads are coming fewer and further between. Someone out there may hold the missing clue that can help find these girls. If you know of someone who started acting suspiciously or "out of norm" since the disappearances or recently sold a vehicle, or if you have other information, contact the F.B.I Tip Line at 1-800-822-0962. No tip is considered too small.

"Somewhere out there someone saw something. Somebody knows something. No matter how minute you think it is, call somebody and let them check and see where it leads. The smallest clue might be the thing that breaks this wide open," said Don Martin, Ashley's grandfather.

To reach Salena De La Cruz e-mail wonderwoman41477@yahoo.com or drop by B-104.



PHOTO BY SALENA DE LA CRUZ / Clackamas Print

Michelle Duffey, left, Miranda Gaddis' mother receives a hug during the ice cream social held at Albertsons in Oregon City on April 5 to raise money to help find her daughter and Ashley Pond.