



SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT  
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**DATE: Wednesday November 14, 2012**  
**TO: NEWS MEDIA**  
**RE: SHERIFF LAUNCHES TELEPHONIC WELFARE CHECKS**

***“Elder Orphans”***  
***You are no longer alone, even if you live alone !!!***

**Madera County** -- Sheriff John Anderson today launched the first its kind electronic messaging service created specifically for citizens who live alone.

“Elder “Orphans,” as the program is called, performs telephonic welfare checks.

This calling service is designed to meet the specific needs of people who live alone, who may be home-bound and do not have the services of an in-home attendant.

Senior Citizens, who register with Elder Orphans, can now receive pre-recorded messages.

“When you answer the phone,” explains Sheriff Anderson, “you will hear a recording that prompts you to respond one of two ways: touch #1 indicating that you have received this message, and you are fine; touch #2 stating there is an emergency. By touching #2 you will be immediately connected to the Sheriff’s Communications Center.

The concept of Elder Orphans was conceived by Sheriff Anderson shortly after receiving a letter from an Oakhurst Senior Citizen.

In August of 2010 Jerry Ongman wrote a moving letter that quite literally, cut to the heart of what scares a good number of senior citizens, that, "Elderly people frequently spend the last few years of their life alone, and when the time comes, they die alone."

Mr. Ongman wrote that letter following three tragic deaths in his mobile park in Oakhurst. Despite living in close proximity to in the small community, their deaths went virtually unnoticed.

In one case, it took up to two days before a neighbor was discovered. Another neighbor wouldn't be found for several weeks; and by the time authorities were notified, the homeowner's pet had died from lack of food and water. A third neighbor's body wasn't discovered until it was already in the advanced stages of decomposition.

In his letter, Mr. Ongman went on to write, "If three people can go unnoticed in a densely populated area like a mobile park, I cannot imagine how bad the problem is the more sparsely populated areas of the county."

Mr. Ongman ended his plea stating, "Easter Sunday I became one of these 'elder orphans' when my wife of 46 years passed away."

Sheriff Anderson met with Mr. Ongman to talk about the challenges senior citizens face, and what Sheriff John could do to alleviate their fears.

During the course of our research to find a program, says Sheriff Anderson, another elder orphan died. This time it was a 79-year old man, who lived alone in Coarsegold. After not seeing him for more than a week, a neighbor called the Sheriff's Office to conduct a welfare check. "One of our Deputies made the tragic discovery. And what made this case especially sad was that he had no living relatives. He lived alone; and he died alone."

In July 2011, a Madera man was found deceased in his apartment. The last time anyone spoke to him or saw him was 6 days earlier. A family member concerned for his wellbeing asked the man's landlord permission to enter the apartment, and subsequently made the tragic discovery.

On May 7, 2012 ... A Madera woman was found dead inside her home. Her body in the advance stages of decomposition. A neighbor discovered her after checking on her because she hadn't been seen in several days. It appears she had been dead at least 10 days before anyone discovered her missing. She too lived alone.

In 2012 the Madera County Sheriff's Office began collaborating with Everbridge, a California based Software Company, to help us launch a unique system designed by the Sheriff's Office, that promised to perform exactly what Mr. Ongman had in mind – daily contact with senior citizens who live alone.

It took the Sheriff's Office two years to design and implement this program, which is free to Madera County subscribers.

Madera County, through the Sheriff's Office of Emergency Service, already contracts with Everbridge. It was through Everbridge Sheriff Anderson was able to establish the Elder Orphans calling plan, at no additional cost to the Sheriff's Office or the citizens of Madera County.

### **Why Elder Orphans?**

Sheriff Anderson recognized the need to establish this program because Madera County is one of the fastest growing counties, with an ever increasing number of retirees.

A recent census disclosed that close to 10 percent of Madera County's population is 65 and older. It's estimated that as many as 10-thousand of them live alone. For reasons beyond their control, more and more senior citizens are being forced to fend for themselves.

With this system in place, Sheriff Anderson wants Madera County senior citizens to know, "Even though they may live alone, they no longer have to be alone."

### **HOW "ELDER ORPHANS" IS DESIGNED TO WORK:**

An automated computer system stores subscriber names, telephone numbers, home addresses, next of kin contact information and a designated call time.

Subscribers receive a pre-recorded message that prompts them to respond electronically. Touch the #1 button to confirm the message has been received indicating he or she is OK.

Touch the #2 button if the subscriber requests emergency assistance. Touching the #2 button transfers the subscriber to the Sheriff's Communications Center.

If the subscriber plans to leave town, the Madera County Sheriff's Department must be notified to stop the service temporarily. Upon the subscriber's return home, he or she will be required to notify the Sheriff's Department so that the free service can resume.

By adopting the "Elder Orphans" program and utilizing the advantages it has to offer our Senior Community, Sheriff Anderson hopes subscribers can find peace of mind knowing that "You are no longer alone, even if you live alone."