



October 8, 2008

## Missing Jericho boy turns up in Williston

*By Matt Sutkoski  
Free Press Staff Writer*

WILLISTON -- Tyler Pillsbury's relatives thought the worst: As of midmorning Tuesday, the 13-year-old had been missing for 18 hours -- gone without a trace. He was not the type to run away from home, hated the dark, and had shown no sign of any kind of wanderlust.

To the relief of his parents and the dozens of volunteers who dropped everything to search for the boy, he turned up shortly before 10 a.m. Tuesday, chilled to the bone but otherwise fine, outside a restaurant at Williston's Taft Corners.

Police and Tyler's parents tried Tuesday to retrace the boy's steps from his woody neighborhood off Governor Peck Road in Jericho to the sidewalk in front of Williston's Mexicali Restaurant.

He'd taken off on his mountain bike Monday afternoon, said Sandra Cormier of Jericho, Tyler's grandmother. At first, nobody worried. Tyler often rode his bike in the neighborhood, and sometimes ended up at a friend's home, Cormier said.

By dark, the family was panicked and searching. By 9 p.m. Monday, the police were involved. At dawn Tuesday, more than three dozen police officials from several agencies and about 40 volunteers were looking for the boy, combing the woods and looking in roadside ditches and under brambles. Vermont State Police, meanwhile, fielded phone calls from people who thought they saw Tyler in different places, including Williston.

Though the push to find Tyler was extensive, authorities did not issue an Amber Alert, which is a voluntary, nationwide partnership among law-enforcement agencies, broadcasters, transportation agencies and the telecommunications industry to activate an urgent bulletin in the most serious child-abduction cases.

In this case, no evidence emerged during the search that Pillsbury had been abducted, so Amber Alert was not declared, Vermont Police Sgt. Tara Thomas said. Authorities use the alert judiciously, she said. "You don't want to overwhelm people because people are not going to pay attention to them,"

she said.

The search command post in Jericho Center erupted in shouts, smiles and hugs before 10 a.m. when State Police Detective Sgt. Don Coffey radioed he found the boy at Mexicali and was en route to the nearby state police barracks. Someone called in a tip saying the boy might have been near Hannaford Supermarket, police said.

Cormier said she was searching for her grandson Tuesday morning in the brush off Governor Peck Road when a police car drove by, and Tyler's mother, Tonya Washburn, yelled from the vehicle her son had been found and she was on her way to Williston. An overwhelming rush of relief washed over her, she said.

Tyler's father, Todd Pillsbury of St. George, emerged from the state police barracks in Williston late in the morning to thank authorities for the intensive search.

"It sounds like I underestimated his adventurousness," Todd Pillsbury said of his son. "We have a lot of talking to do."

State police told him Tyler left his home Monday night on his own free will and did not intend to return home that evening.

After he was found, Tyler realized searchers had practically turned the county upside down looking for him, Todd Pillsbury said. "He's a pretty upset 13-year-old kid," his father said.

Cormier said she caught a glimpse of her grandson at the barracks as he talked to his parents. "He looked very pale and tired," she said. Cold, too. Temperatures fell to as low as 32 degrees Tuesday morning at Burlington International Airport.

She was mystified by details of his wanderings. "I think he got confused. He's petrified of the dark. I think he got scared and found a place to stay put," she said. Cormier said it appears Tyler holed up overnight at a water tower just south of Maple Tree Place, then emerged when the sun rose.

Cormier and the rest of the family repeatedly praised police and volunteers who searched for Tyler. "Everybody was so wonderful," said Lee Fournier of Hinesburg, Tyler's great-aunt.

Contact Matt Sutkoski at 660-1846 or [msutkosk@bfp.burlingtonfreepress.com](mailto:msutkosk@bfp.burlingtonfreepress.com).

---