

Crescent City man still missing

September 6, 2019



This is Day 8 for the Dantzman family.

It's been eight days since Norbert (Tony) Dantzman, who was attending a family centennial reunion in rural Winter, Wisconsin, walked away from his motel room and disappeared.

Dantzman, 89, suffers from dementia and other cognitive issues. He had traveled from Crescent City to Wisconsin with his daughter, Cindy Dantzman-Smith, and her husband, Kendall.

Granddaughter Haley Smith, who couldn't attend the reunion, is coordinating communications for the family with the Sawyer County search efforts in Wisconsin.

"I feel so helpless," said Smith. "They're trying so hard. The head of the search and rescue team said that after a long day of searching, she goes home and the search area becomes her back yard.

"They've done an amazing job. I really appreciate their time and effort," Smith said.

The search began at 10:38 a.m. Aug. 30, when the Sawyer County Sheriff's Department received a 911 call reporting Dantzman missing from the Winter Northern Lights Motel in the Village of Winter.

According to the sheriff's office, surveillance cameras at the motel showed Dantzman leaving his room about 9 a.m. and walking north toward the Norwood Trailer Court.

Eyewitnesses at the trailer court said they saw an elderly man fitting Dantzman's description walking at 9:30 through the trailer court toward County Highway West, the continuing north along the highway.

Sawyer County Deputies, Sawyer County Search and Rescue personnel, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, the Winter Fire Department, and family and community members combed the immediate area, executing grid searches while utilizing drones and canines.

No trace of Dantzman was found. The search efforts were suspended late that evening.

Family members said they're surprised Dantzman would wander off alone.

"He's never wandered off before," said his oldest daughter, Sandra Garner, who lives in Grants Pass and was unable to attend the reunion because of a broken ankle.

"He spent the night a few weeks ago at my house and didn't wander off. I used to take him dancing once a month at the VA. He loves to sing and play the harmonica. He's just a cheerful guy."

The search for Dantzman expanded over the next several days. The Wisconsin State Patrol added additional aerial support, the Wisconsin Canine Emergency Response Team joined in, and the Civil Air Patrol and the National Guard provided aerial support as well.

"Sadly, after three days/nights of ground searches, ATV's, dogs, drones, cars, trucks, airplanes and helicopters, there has been no trace of Uncle Tony," Vicki Gutsch wrote on her Facebook page.

"As everyone returns to their 'normal' lives, we are still hopeful there is someone out there who gave Tony a ride but who maybe didn't know that he was a missing person, until now, and will come forward with a clue that will lead us to him."

His granddaughter, Smith, said Sawyer County Search and Rescue has not given up their search. On Friday, they scoured the area again with a team of about 20.

And members of the search team are keeping an eye on the nearby Dantzman Ranch, where he grew up, although it's under different ownership now. The search is including any empty buildings, any places that may be familiar to Dantzman.

"We've checked in places that might have Marines or other veterans," Smith said. "He's in casinos all the time, but he didn't have any money on him at the time."

"He loves music or singing. He'd go anywhere there is a band playing. For a man his age with dementia, he's still all go, go, go. He's hard to slow down."

Dantzman previously had been a building contractor, responsible for many of the buildings and homes in the Crescent City area. He was married to Crescent City native Beverly Dantzman for 65 years before she passed away about three years ago, Smith said.

Smith fears that the over last three days before he left for Wisconsin, maybe the dementia was accelerating.

“I’m worried about him being out there so long. We always tried to keep him hydrated,” she said.

Smith said the family has been putting the word out through social media in an effort to recruit more eyes on the road, including half a dozen semi-truck drivers’ Facebook pages.

And Smith and Gardner have called homeless shelters, VA hospitals and other places he may have shown up, given his status as a Marine veteran.

While Smith is not quite buying that her grandfather would hitchhike, given that there’s been no evidence of him in the immediate area, she’s not discounting that he may have grabbed a ride, either.

“He maybe would get in a vehicle, saying he’s from California, then getting confused and getting it backward in which direction he needed to go,” she said.

“He’s such a flirt, he may have been picked up by a lady who doesn’t know he’s missing.

“We’re just hoping for the best.”