

BUSINESS MONDAY»

naplesnews.com | Monday, September 12, 2011 | NAPLES DAILY NEWS | SECTION B

TRACKING SKILLS

OWNER OF LOCATEURCELL.COM OUT TO HELP LOCATE MISSING PEOPLE

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Late on a mid-July night, Frank Rabbito received a telephone call from a frantic mother whose daughter was two hours late returning from Miami.

"She said she was supposed to be home," Rabbito said. "She wasn't answering her phone."

The woman recalled that her daughter had just signed up for a trial membership to Rabbito's new website, LocateURcell.com, which promises to find people, young and old, by tracking their cellphones. Within minutes — after answering some basic security questions — Rabbito said he was able to track the girl's cellphone to Alligator Alley.

Turns out, she had run out of gas.

"There's no lights. It's dark. She was in a dead cell zone," Rabbito said. "It was one of those flukes. You get caught in one of those Catch-22s where everything that could go wrong went wrong."

"She was scared, but she was OK."

Rabbito, who lives in Naples, launched the website in mid-July. The goal, he said, is not to make money — he's made enough as president of Ashley Norman Associates, which specializes in corporate background checks — but rather to help find people when they are lost and vulnerable.

The idea for the product came to Rabbito one night when he was sitting with his wife, drinking wine and discussing the news. In particular, they were talking about silver alerts — public notifications for missing seniors.

"I said, 'There's got to be a way to find these people,'" Rabbito said. "I did some investigation. I found that 98 percent of the people in the country have cellphones."

Rabbito started LocateURcell.com with the help of Dan Grable, a programmer. They negotiated with cellphone carriers for access to their networks.

With AT&T, Sprint and T-Mobile phones, LocateURcell.com utilizes GPS technology to track registered cellphones to within a few feet of their location. With Verizon, they use less-precise cellular triangulation technology.

People can sign up online and track their registered phones on the company's website. Login is secure, and the carriers have rigid privacy requirements, Rabbito said.

He's marketing the product, in part, through charities and nonprofits, which receive 40 percent of the proceeds when they sell a \$104 annual subscription — \$2 per week — good for two cellphones.

It's perpetual — the charity keeps getting its 40 percent every year, as long as its customers keep their accounts — and it's an alternative to selling cookies door-to-door, or holding bake sales.

"No calories," Rabbito said.

The Naples Youth Soccer Club is slated to be the first organization to raise money by selling the service.

"Money goes back to the club, so that will help with our scholarship fund," said Bryan Rodrigues, the club's president.

Although Rabbito developed his website to help find missing people, it can also be used to simply find a missing cellphone.

Corena Salazar of Cedar Park, Texas, first



Frank Rabbito started a new website, LocateURcell.com, to help locate people by tracking their cellphones. **Gary Jung/Special to the Daily News**

came across Rabbito on the Internet when she was desperately trying to find her iPhone. She had been shopping at a grocery store, and no matter how many times she looked for her phone, it was nowhere to be found.

Her cellphone provider, AT&T, could only tell her whether there was activity on her phone, not where it was.

Rabbito first narrowed the phone's location down to the color of the buildings, then described the peaks of the building and then said it was in the front of a Walmart near her home, Salazar said. Armed with this new information, she went back to Walmart and an employee pulled each cart apart.

She found her phone, in its gray cover, in the crevasse of a gray cart.

"I think it is very useful," she said of the service. "My mother gets lost a lot ... We need to get her number set up."

Salazar now has a subscription, but added, "There was no guarantee that I would sign up" when Rabbito helped her.

Rabbito said he's just trying to break even. If LocateURcell.com turns a profit at the end of the year, he said, he plans to divvy it up among his participating charities.

"That's the way it should be," he said. "You get to a point in your life and how much do you need?"

"I said 'There's got to be a way to find these people.'"

— Frank Rabbito

on Silver Alerts inspiring his new business