

How Sumter County Sheriff's Office Uses New Technology to Decrease the Cost of Finding Wanderers by 50% and Improve Community Satisfaction

Sumter County Sheriff's Office serves the largest retirement community in the world, The Villages in Florida. With the rapidly expanding community, an increasing rate of Alzheimer's and dementia created a growing number of residents of The Villages who are living with Alzheimer's and dementia.

Sumter County found it was having to mount an increasing number of search and rescues to find those who had wandered. The average cost of a search and rescue is over \$13,500, not to mention the emotional cost to the family, and risk of injury or death to their loved one.

The Villages has many water features and busy roads that can make wandering even more dangerous. Sumter County Sheriff's wanted to use technology to be able to quickly find and locate dementia residents who had wandered before they were in peril.

Sumter County Sheriff's Office's Victim Services Manager, Sharon Howard conceived of a new approach. She researched technologies available for GPS tracking and communication with wanderers instead of the current GPS tracking alternatives law enforcement has for search and rescue. Current solutions require mounting a full search and rescue, and a more intense use of law enforcement resources to keep the programs running. These tracking alternatives also do not involve the family caregivers as part of the solution.

Once Ms. Howard had identified the Theora® Care solution as a perfect fit for her residents' needs, she applied for a grant from the Department of Justice to use this new technology to track, locate, and communicate with wanderers.

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The Villages ranks as America's top-selling, master planned community for active adults who are 55 years old and over. In 2020, the Villages was recognized for the 11th consecutive year as the number one, active adult community in the US. As of 2022, over 138,000 residents called the 82 square miles of The Villages home. Between 2010 and 2020, The Villages was the fastest growing metropolitan area in the United States, growing 39 percent, from about 93,000 in 2010 to about 130,000 in 2020.

About 1 in 9 people (10.7%) age 65 and older has Alzheimer's dementia. (Source: Alzheimer's Association, 2022)



Families can contact the Sheriff's Office and receive a GPS enabled watch, Theora Connect™, for their loved one living with Alzheimer's/dementia. The watches are provided free of charge to families and the Sheriff's Office is reimbursed through grant funding for the purchase and monthly service charge of the device.

The Sheriff's Office helps each family caregiver download and set up the Theora Link™ smartphone app, which they use to track their loved ones. Ms. Howard also felt this solution was a better solution for families than existing Personal Emergency Response Systems (PERS) as many do not provide the family caregivers with the ability to locate their loved ones and communicate with them directly, quickly, and easily. Many PERS devices will only be monitored with professional call centers, and do not include the family caregiver until after an incident. Creating a partnership with the family caregivers and law enforcement has significantly improved outcomes.

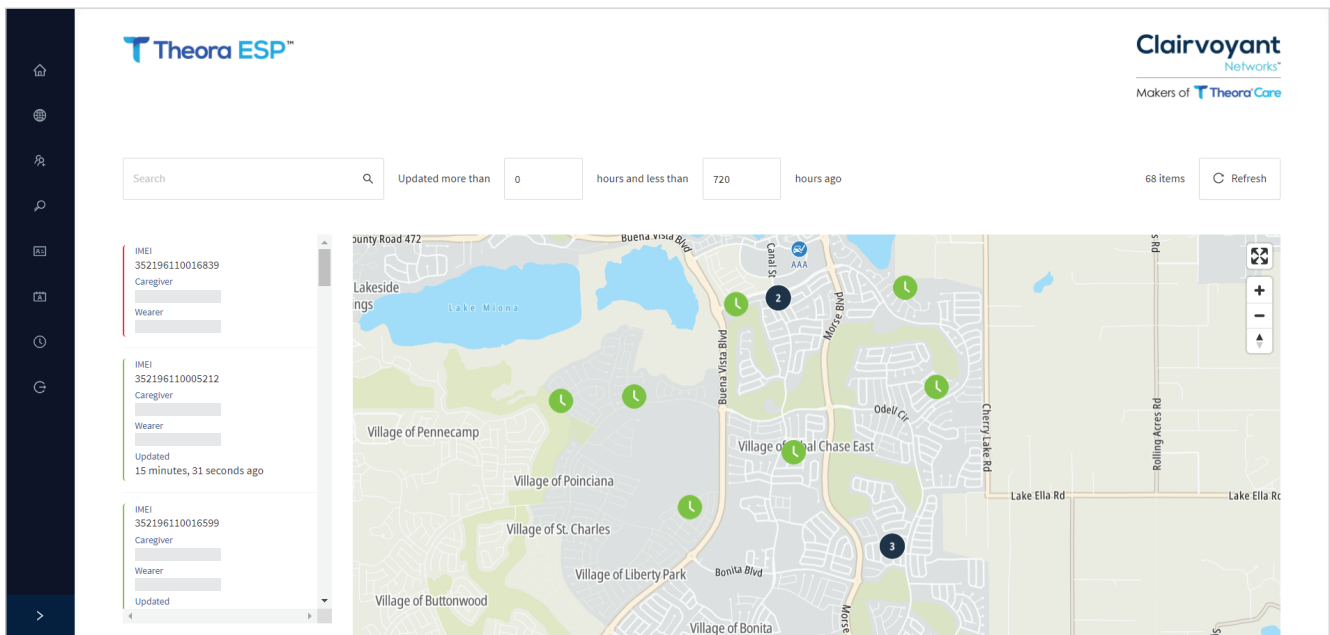


Figure 1 Theora ESP Dashboard

SCSO also sets up each family in the Sheriff's monitoring dashboard, Theora ESP™. Theora ESP allows the sheriff's office to know location, when last updated, and contact information for the primary caregiver, in case of a search and rescue. The Theora Link smartphone app is downloaded on the primary caregiver's phone and gives them the ability to track location, activity, movement, entering and exiting safe zone geofences, and most importantly the ability to instantly communicate with their loved one wearing a Theora Connect. With Theora Link, the family caregiver can call the smartwatch and it will automatically answer for the wearer. The caregiver and wearer can speak without the wearer having to do anything. This capability is very useful when the family caregiver gets an alert that a loved one has wandered to both call them and find out what they are doing, and also to reassure them they are on their way to the wanderer's location.

This initiative also concentrates on training for law enforcement in responding to people living with dementia and their caregivers. Additionally, they work with families to link them to support groups, services, and education for caregivers. Staff follow up with families once a month to get information on how often it is used.

Outcomes

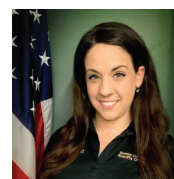
Sumter County Sheriff's Office has experienced a 50% decrease in calls for service for a missing person with Alzheimer's/dementia because family caregivers are able to proactively use the technology to locate their loved one before reaching out to law enforcement for help. They have found that a family caregiver can locate and retrieve their loved one in an average 6 minutes, vs. an average 3-hour recovery if the Sheriff's Office needs to mount a search and rescue.

With this program, Sumter County Sheriff's has not only improved community satisfaction with their service, but also reduced the costs of recovering a person who has wandered. With the education and support programs included in this endeavor, SCSO is also elevating the level of safety, satisfaction, and peace of mind for not only the residents of The Villages retirement community, but also the residents of the County.

The implementation of this program has helped families keep their loved ones safe at home. Sumter County Sheriff's Office knows that the longer someone living with Alzheimer's or dementia is missing, the greater the risk that they will be seriously injured or worse. Ms. Howard states, "The families that are provided with the GPS device report a peace of mind they weren't able to enjoy before the program. This program helps keep loved ones at home with their caregivers longer and gives some autonomy to individuals living with Alzheimer's and dementia. New advancements in technology, such as this, are improving the lives of caregivers and their loved ones".



Sumter County Sheriff's Office (SCSO) serves a wide range of constituents. The men and women of the Sumter County Sheriff's Office are pledged and dedicated to protecting the lives, property, and quality of life of the citizens of Sumter County with integrity, professionalism, and compassion. We are accountable to our citizens to carry out our mission impartially and courteously protecting everyone's civil liberties in partnership with the citizens of Sumter County to serve and enrich our community.



Sharon Howard
Victim Services
Manager

The Theora Care suite of IoT devices and SaaS applications provide caregivers with better day-to-day information, communications, and location services for their loved ones. Our solutions deliver situational awareness not only for the caregiver, but also for the professionals, medical and care management that are involved in the loved one's care plan. Theora Care is located in Austin, TX. Our customers range from family caregivers, to industry leaders such as Baylor, Scott and White and Texas A&M.

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