

April 8, 1997

Press Release: Immediate

Website: www.*****.com

e-mail: *****@*****.com

Contact: Mr. Director

Phone: (***)***-****

Fax: (***)***-****

SEARCH CONTINUES FOR MISSING 12 YEAR-OLD FRIENDSWOOD GIRL

Friendswood, Texas - More than a thousand volunteers, including Scouts, Texas State Guard, Coast Guard, and community members have been working around the clock since Thursday, April 3, searching for 12- year-old Laura Smither.

The serenity of this small suburban town was shattered that morning, as word began to spread that Laura had vanished. Laura, schooled at home, had gone for a short jog at 9:00 AM near her rural home on Ware Dairy Road in the Friendswood/Alvin area (20 miles Southeast of Houston). She was expected back in twenty minutes. When Laura did not return by 9:30 AM, her parents, Bob and Gay Smither, knew that something was very wrong and immediately notified the Friendswood Police Department.

The outpouring of support from the community has been incredible. More than 50,000 flyers have been distributed by volunteers throughout the community. Thousands of yards of yellow ribbon, cut by volunteers (many of them children), blow in the wind. Tied around trees and car antennas, they show this community's faith and hope for Laura's safe return.

Search teams are being dispatched continuously from dawn to dusk, braving treacherous conditions. In addition to the Texas State Guard and Coast Guard, there are more than 1,000 local volunteers helping in many ways. They staff the Laura Recovery Center, and search on foot, horseback, in all-terrain vehicles and with dogs in the surrounding area and bayous. Telephone lines are constantly in use, with incoming tips, faxing Laura's flier and volunteers calling out asking for donations and assistance.

Laura is a member of the Girl Scouts, and her mother is the troop leader. The Girl Scouts' national office is faxing flyers to every troop in the country. The Smither family is a member of their local Episcopal Church of the Good Shepherd. Episcopal dioceses and churches nationwide also are receiving fliers trying to help find the girl.

Laura was last seen wearing a black T-shirt, dark blue shorts and white running shoes. She is 5'3" tall and weighs 98 pounds. She has long curly dark brown hair, a fair complexion, braces and green eyes. A \$50,000 reward is being offered for information that leads to Laura's safe return. Anyone who can provide information is asked to call the Friendswood Police Department at (***) ***-****, (***) ***-**** or 1-800-***-****.

News coverage is continuing to spread, as is the search. Thanks to the Internet and fax machines, fliers are rapidly moving across the United States, Mexico, Canada and Europe.

Donations are needed to cover both recovery expenses and to fund the reward. There are separate accounts for each of these. To make a donation to the reward fund, checks should be made payable to the Laura Smither Reward Fund at P.O. Box 34, Friendswood, TX 77549. Checks for the recovery expense fund should be made payable to the Laura K. Smither Recovery Expense Fund and mailed to the same address.

Anyone interested in volunteering in any capacity can call (***) ***-****.

The volunteers are committed to the search until Laura is brought home. For this Texas community, Laura Smither has become every family's child.