

Middlebury Police Department

Media Release

26 Feb 2008 6:00 p.m.

SUB: Missing Person Investigation

Nicholas Garza, age 19, student, Middlebury College

The investigation into the disappearance of Nicholas Garza continues. Through this date, there have been two primary aspects of the investigation:

1. The physical search for Nicholas Garza and/or any evidence that may provide information as to his whereabouts and the manner and cause of his disappearance. This search is targeting campus areas and is at this time a search and recovery operation.
2. The Missing Person investigation. The purpose of the Missing Person investigation is to develop fact patterns and investigative leads that may tend to provide information as to the whereabouts of Nicholas Garza and the circumstances, manner, and cause of his disappearance. Unlike the physical search, which is focused on recovery, the Missing Person investigation makes no assumption on the status of Nicholas Garza. All leads are catalogued and followed up and all possibilities are considered open until closed or proven by evidence.

Both aspects of the investigation are being conducted parallel yet mutually supportive of each other.

The Physical Search

The physical search has been suspended at this time due to weather conditions and heavy snow. The search was initiated on Monday, February 11, 2008, when the common travel route between Nicholas's departure point (Stewart dormitory) and his residence hall, Allen Dormitory was searched by members of the Middlebury Fire Department and Community Emergency Response Team.

On February 12, 2008, the search was turned over to the Vermont State Police Search and Rescue Team, working under the command of the Middlebury Police Department. On that day, extensive areas around the departure and destination points were searched as well as all connected areas.

After a period of bad weather, the search resumed on Saturday, February 16, 2008 on other areas of the campus. At that point the Vermont Search and Rescue Team suspended further searching until either the snow pack melted or other information was developed through the Missing Person investigation providing further leads to focus the search.

On Saturday, February 23, a search resumed in the lower campus area by members of the Middlebury Fire Department and other volunteers.

Daily since February 12, an examination of compacted and transported snow piles around the campus has been on going by operators employing heavy equipment. Augmenting this, ground penetrating radar has been deployed in certain areas of large piles of snow.

During the time college staff has been proceeding with an intensive search of all indoor areas of the campus, including confined spaces and other areas generally inaccessible to the campus community at-large.

The Police Department has been in contact with Equu-Search, a non-profit entity whose purpose is to locate missing persons using technology and a variety of search techniques. The Department has invited Equu-Search to participate in the physical search. Equu-Search will focus on the physical search aspect of the case under the purview of the Police Department. The Police Department will continue the Missing Person investigation. The Equu-Search activity has been postponed due to the impending snowstorm.

The Missing Person Investigation

A detailed time line of Nicholas Garza's activity has been assembled for the evening leading to his disappearance. While no information has been developed to indicate foul play, there is no information to support any other definitive conclusion at this point.

Interviews of students and others continues. Assessment of time data, including security patrol checks, cellular phone records, internet records, access card records continues.

The last known contact with Nicholas Garza was about 11:06 p.m. on February 5th, as he walked down a staircase at Stewart dorm, and a minute later made an unanswered call to the student he last spoke with as he was departing. By 6:42 a.m. on February 6, 2008, or earlier, his cellular phone was unable to receive any calls or messages.

Heavy snow began sometime shortly before 3 a.m. and continued through the morning.

While the search has been suspended and re-started, the investigation continues unabated. The Middlebury College community, led by President Liebowitz and the Public Safety Department, have been providing invaluable aid to support all aspects of the investigation.

Thomas Hanley
Chief of Police