

# Missing elderly woman located by search team

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An 86-year-old resident of the Ridge Oak senior citizens housing complex in Bernards Township was found alive and unharmed yesterday morning after an all-night search drew on the expertise of several statewide agencies, authorities said.

Elsie Rodeman was found at 8:15 a.m. lying on the edge of a swampy spot off North Maple Avenue by two members of New Jersey Search and Rescue, a Bergen County agency providing round-the-clock trained volunteers for searches, police and rescuers said.

"I called out her name and we heard 'Yeah!'" said rescuer Peter Bremy. "Her voice was kind of faint, though, and Sue and I looked at each other as if to say, 'Did you hear what I heard?'"

Bremy was partnered with fellow rescuer Sue Lavoie, handler for 10-year-old German shepherd Jerry, for the expedition. Rodeman was awake and coherent when they approached her, asking questions about her dog, but unable to explain how or why she ended up where she did, he said.

Rodeman was fortunate she found a spot of high ground to stretch out on because just a few feet away the mud was waist-high, Bremy said.

"It could have been a whole different outcome," he said.

She was transported to Morristown Memorial Hospital, where she was treated for severe hypothermia and listed in serious condition, authorities and family members said.

Rodeman's daughter, Rena Thorsen of Basking Ridge, said the family was "extremely grateful" to the police and other agencies and to the prayers sent out through a prayer chain set up through Bishop Janes United Methodist Church in town.

"It's very serendipitous that within a half hour after the prayer chain started, she was found," Thorsen said.

Police began the search at 7:20 p.m. Sunday, as soon as they received a call from family members checking up on her, Police Chief Dennis Mott said.

She had been out walking her dog, but family members grew concerned when the dog returned

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with its leash and there was no sign of Rodeman, Mott said.

Police set up a command post

at Ridge Oak, off Manchester Drive, and called out a search party to cover the area by foot, paw, hoof and air. Since the neighborhood is near the Great Swamp, searchers were aided by canine units from the Palisades, Essex County, Manville and by New Jersey Air National Guard helicopter with infrared heat-detecting capabilities.

Mounted units from Bergen, Morris and Passaic counties were at the scene or on their way to help in the expedition, Mott said.

"It was a great team effort," he said. "We're very fortunate she is alive."

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