

Rain.  
High 65. Low 45.  
Friday: Scattered showers. ■

On Guard For 159 Years

## Sleuths specialize in bittersweet family reunions

BY JIM SCHAEFER  
Free Press Staff Writer

Mike Kramer had already pulled the newspaper salesman trick.

Mark Miller had pretended to be a regular neighborhood guy out for a stroll.

As a result, Jeannie VanConant waited for police to storm her ex-husband's Roseville home Tuesday night and retrieve her daughter, Angela. She was about to see her 4-year-old for the first time in nearly two years,

thanks to Miller and Kramer, who run the American Association for Lost Children — a nonprofit group that seeks out missing kids.

VanConant was worried her daughter wouldn't remember her.

"I'm scared," she said. She had called Miller and Kramer for help after Donald VanConant, 25, allegedly kidnapped Angela during the breakup of his marriage to Jeannie, who had custody of both their children.

Donald was charged with parental

kidnapping, Roseville police said, and that's what Kramer and Miller needed to get started. They work only on cases in which felony warrants have been issued.

"When they started searching Monday afternoon, they quickly found Angela after investigating several addresses where Jeannie thought her ex-husband might be.

In the 25000 block of Normandy, north of 10 Mile, Kramer pretended to be a newspaper salesman. With several

editions under his arm, he knocked on the door of Donald VanConant's neighbor. The neighbor didn't buy a subscription, but Kramer was able to find out a little about VanConant.

Miller gathered information while cruising by in his car or strolling along the street, mentally jotting down the makes of vehicles going in and out of the driveway, visitors to the home and the thought that "they just had the

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## Bittersweet family reunion comes after sleuth work

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drapes pulled too tight."

After a day of such tactics, they convinced Roseville police that Angela and her father were in the house. Police found Angela about 11:30 p.m. Tuesday. Donald VanConant was not home, and was still at large Wednesday.

Miller speaks proudly of his organization, which becomes embroiled in the often-agonizing personal lives of his clients. "This is a form of child abuse," he said. "Would you want to see your kid missing for two years? Would you want them to be told the other parent is dead?"

Since Miller founded his organization in July 1987, the group has located 31 kidnapped children, he said. Most cases are custody battles.

When Angela disappeared from her New Baltimore home on July 30, 1988, Jeannie VanConant believed her husband took the girl, but she could not find him. After unsuccessful contacts with several missing children's agencies and police, she saw television's "Hard Copy," which profiled the American Association for Lost Children earlier this year.

"I called them up," she said. "They had about 500 other cases and I almost gave up hope right then. But they called me back."

She had no money, Miller and Kramer do not charge for their services, but they needed donations to make the trip to Michigan. They function on proceeds from candy sales and donations from people and corporations such as Continental Airlines, which flies them free.

Students at Baker College in Flint, where Jeannie VanConant attends full time, raised \$400 from a bake sale and brought Miller and Kramer up.

Late Tuesday night, as she peered through the spring rain toward the home where she hoped her child was,



Angela VanConant was reunited with her mother Wednesday by Roseville police.

she said. "At 4:30 this morning I came down here from Burton."

She and her 2-year-old son, Kevin, have lived in the town near Flint since her marriage broke up and Angela disappeared, she said.

"I got here at a quarter after 6 and we've been watching the house ever since," she said.

But this reunion, like many of the others, was not joyous.

When Sgt. Richard Heinz carried Angela out to Jeannie VanConant, the pain worsened, at least for the moment.

Jeannie wailed with relief when she saw Heinz with Angela. "Can I get her?" she asked softly while holding out her arms. But Angela, looking puzzled and indifferent, turned to Heinz and spoke of her father's friend, Robin. "That's my mom," Angela said.

Jeannie VanConant broke down. But Miller stepped up, gave her a hug and said: "It's OK. It'll take a while. He lied to her."

For more information about the American Association for Lost Children, call 1-800-873-5678.



Angela, who was abducted by her father two years ago in a child custody battle, is reunited with her mother in Roseville.

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