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By Bill Beard Star-Gazette

The missing Schuyler County man, Oliver Phillip Heaton, 71, returned home Monday morning, unharmed but dehydrated. His brother, Dick Heaton, reported Phil returned to his residence on Old U.S. 67, near Heaton Lane, about three miles east of Rushville, at about 7:10 a.m. His brother took Heaton, who is in the early stages of Alzheimer's disease, to Culbertson Memorial Hospital in Rushville. A hospital spokeswoman later informed the Schuyler County Sheriff's Office that Phil Heaton was fine though a bit dehydrated. ___PUBLIC__

Thus, the nearly five-day search by members of nine different law enforcement agencies came to a happy ending. Schuyler County Sheriff Don Schieferdecker had deputies and auxiliary personnel patrolling Heaton's rural neighborhood as well as the village of Ray, Heaton's childhood home.

A man fitting Heaton's description -- 5 feet 7 inches tall, 165 pounds, grey hair, hazel eyes, and possibly wearing blue jeans, a western-style plaid shirt and western boots -- had been spotted Thursday afternoon, walking east from Beardstown on the Chandlerville Blacktop. Mary Ann Harris of rural Chandlerville believed she saw Heaton on the blacktop near Brick School. She asked if he needed help and offered use of her cell phone. She didn't offer a ride after he became confused while identifying himself as "Joe." She had her infant son in the vehicle and became concerned for their safety. Harris gave the man a bottle of water and later reported the incident to a police officer friend and posted on Facebook about the man.

The Illinois Search and Rescue Council (ISRC) established a command center at Nate's Park on Ill. Rt. 78 in Chandlerville on Thursday, and coordinated the search along several local roads, including Jim Edgar Panther Creek State Fish and Wildlife Area.

Curt Hannig, Brown County Emergency Management director and ISRC member, said the last sighting of a man fitting Heaton's description was in the Chandlerville area. Heaton had "possible connections" in the Havana area, which may have been his destination.

However, because of Heaton's illness, it probably will never be known where he was going, or what were his intentions. It is safe to say that all involved with the search, along with the many well-wishers who prayed for Heaton's safe return, were very pleased with the outcome.

The rescue team included: ISRC, Emergency Management teams from Adams, Brown, Fulton, Menard, Peoria, Pike and Tazewell counties; Cass County Sheriff's Department; Schuyler County Sheriff's Department; and air searches conducted by the Illinois State Police and Illinois Department of Transportation.