

Nikki from page A1

long-haired dog had been spotted heading north around 1 p.m. — on Orchard Lake Road, between 14 and 16 Mile, of all places — but had taken off running when a merchant tried to catch her.

On Monday morning, the Matuszes onliated the West Bloomfield School District bus drivers, who gladly kept watch, Darlene said. But Nikki wasn't seen.

The only dog

The boys were heartbroken: They had only had Nikki two years and she was the only dog they'd ever really known, said their mother.

She and Arnie had their own angst: A dog they had gotten when the boys were babies also had run away.

Arnie told Darlene on Tuesday to give the Farmington Schools drivers a try and she agreed: Matt and Brett hadn't stopped crying over Nikki.

It was the best move possible: She soon would learn from the drivers that Nikki was indeed in the Hills.

But at the time, all Darlene could think of was how gracious the Farmington drivers were, considering the Matuszes aren't residents and their boys don't even attend the public schools — Darlene takes them to Our Lady of Sorrows Church School in Farmington every day.

One driver told her, "We would help anybody."

Chris Corrie, a substitute driver of 18 months, started posting the flier.

"All of us," said Corrie, "are always watching out for things that might run out into the road ... We've had drivers put on the red kiddie (bus) lights for ducks crossing ... (The drivers are) a big-hearted group."

In this case, more than big-hearted — more like guardian angels, with one Nancy Gangnier, who joined the Farmington school bus service the same time as Corrie, en pointe.

Among the drivers, said Corrie, "Nancy is like the animal lover ... She raises birds."

Gangnier also "had a dog she grew up with that got run over on a highway one time."

She'd be it

Of all the drivers, "She would be the one out there to help anybody," said Corrie.

But Nancy Gangnier had another reason: "We have two shelter too and we just had a litter of pups."

The picture of Matt, Brett and Nikki on the Matusz flier was all she needed: "I told my husband to be on the lookout for that little girl," she said of Nikki.

About 40 minutes later, hus-

band Mark, a driver for Metro Cars limousine service, called her on the cellular phone to say he'd spotted the dog near Harrison High.

Nancy told him to call Nikki by name.

The ID was positive: Nikki "stopped and looked," but kept going, Mark said.

Darlene Matusz was both stunned and fearful when Nancy called to say the dog was trying to cross 12 Mile. Nancy gave her directions and Darlene was on

her way.

The Gangniers' involvement would end there: Mark had to get to an appointment. But dispatcher Marlene Morrison was soon passing along "Nikki sightings" from other substitute bus drivers — including the heart-pounding in which the sheltie was running east along Interstate 696. "I thought she was dead for sure," said Darlene.

Somehow, the dog exited unscathed at Middlebelt. With the various drivers' help, Dar-

lene, joined by husband Arnie in a cell-phone linkup with Morrison, finally caught up with cold, hungry, scared and weary Nikki around 3 p.m. at 12 Mile and Inkster Roads — miles from where it all began.

Even Nikki was crying at the reunion, Darlene said. And the pooch now stays either on her chain in the back yard or on a short leash during walks.

When the Matuszes learned the bus drivers were having their holiday party, the family

showed up with trays of shrimp, sandwiches, desserts and fruit.

The drivers "were such nice, nice people," said Darlene. "It was so incredible that they would go out of their way" to help find Nikki.

Gangnier and dispatcher Morrison say it's simple: "We do what we can for the community out there. It happened to turn out nice."

"For us drivers, because we are on the road, part of our job is to be aware of what's around us,"

said Gangnier.

"Especially with the holiday, the last thing we want is a sad ending," she said. "We're so thrilled it worked out as well as it did."

Gangnier shrugged off her part with, "I just happened to tell my husband, 'Be on the lookout.' He called and I thought it was a joke."

"I mean, what are the chances of that happening?"

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Bust from A1

call the Child Abuse and Neglect Council of Oakland County after a resident called to report a suspicious person had knocked on the door and asked for someone the homeowner didn't know. An officer later stopped a car in the area and identified its three occupants.

When a burglary report came in later that evening, authorities knew right where to look for the suspects.

"When strangers come to the door asking for people, always call the police department," Nebus said. "We wait for those calls, because 98 percent of burglars knock or ring the bell before they break into a house."

He credited officers in Franklin for linking the two reports. The method of operation in the burglary was also similar to those in Farmington Hills, Nebus said.

Franklin and Hills police, the Secret Service and South Oakland Narcotics Intelligence Consortium officers conducted a surveillance Wednesday, and Franklin police obtained arrest warrants that were executed Thursday morning.

A 30-year-old Farmington Hills man, a 20-year-old Franklin man and a 17-year-old Franklin teen are in custody, awaiting charges. Nebus said it could be a while before Farmington Hills detectives sort out the recovered property, necessary for the preparation of warrants for the local crimes.

"Fortunately, a lot of the property has ways for us to identify who it belongs to," Nebus said.

The department has sent teletypes to other southeast Michigan agencies, and it's possible the thieves were working in Troy, Livonia and as far north as Sterling Heights.