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GH teen presumed drowned



Tribune photo/Kyle Moroney
Conditions continued to be too rough this morning for emergency officials to search for 19-year-old Daniel Reiss who was swept off the pier Saturday night and is presumed drowned.

By Kyle Moroney
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Police said they must wait for Mother Nature's powers to calm before continuing their search for a 19-year-old Grand Haven man, who is presumed drowned after being washed off the pier by a wave late Saturday night.

"The weather is too windy and the waves are too big. We're not going to risk people going out there (right now)," Grand Haven Department of Public Safety Lt. Brad Risher said this morning. "We're going to wait for the weather to break."

Daniel Luke Reiss, a 2002 Grand Haven High School graduate, was running alongside the south pier's most western lighthouse

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36	33	35	36	34
28	22	18	22	28

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with seven other friends, just before 11:30 p.m. Saturday, when they lost site of Reiss, GHDPS Lt. Rick Yonker said.

The group had gone to the pier specifically to jump over the breaking waves, said GHDPS officer Tom Winegar. From interviews with Reiss' friends, Winegar said it appeared that the weather conditions steadily escalated after the group arrived at the pier, and Reiss was caught by an unusually strong blast of water.

Reiss' friends, all of the Tri-Cities area and ranging in age from 18 to 23, heard him calling for help and found him in the choppy Lake Michigan water about 30 yards southeast of the pierhead, according to Yonker. As Reiss' friends attempted to rescue him, the waves continued to carry Reiss out about 10 to 15 feet from the pier.

During the rescue attempt, the waves continued to increase and unremittingly washed over the pier. Rescue personnel then had to call off their search due to the hazardous conditions.

But the Coast Guard's 47-foot motor lifeboat continued to search for Reiss until 2:40 a.m. Sunday and its helicopter from the Traverse City Air Station searched for the 19-year-old until 3:15 a.m.

At the time of the search, the water temperature was 47 degrees, and southwest winds were blowing at 30 knots and carrying 8 to 10 foot waves, according to the Coast Guard.

About five hours later, all rescue units were going to attempt to resume the search. However, authorities determined the conditions on Lake Michigan were still too treacherous to search for Reiss, and will resume when conditions improve, Yonker said.

If conditions allowed for a search today, the dive team, along with rescue boats and a helicopter, would be scouring through and above the waters in hopes of finding Reiss, Risher said. Combing the waters with a "human chain" would be too dangerous in these conditions because the waves are too powerful, and Reiss is believed to be near the end of the pier where water is above most people's heads, Risher explained.

Lt. Rebecca Heatherington of the Coast Guard Group Grand Haven said they are in what they call an "active search suspension, pending further information -- which means that the Coast Guard is no longer involved in this particular incident, unless more information develops and they are called to assist in the search and recovery effort.

"The conditions right now don't allow us to go out,"
Heatherington said this morning.

She stated that the Coast Guard goes through a decision process for every water-related search, which includes looking at the weather conditions at the time of the incident to the current day and what the probability is of survival.

Reiss' family remain hopeful to find the 19-year-old, a second-year student at Grand Valley State University, according to his uncle, Sgt. Mark Reiss of the Grand Haven Department of Public Safety.

"He was a very nice young man. He was a 4.0 student at high school and at college," Mark Reiss said, noting his nephew was studying to be an engineer at GVSU. "He had offers at Massachusetts Institute of Technology and West Point, but he decided to stay around."

Mark Reiss said his nephew received a black belt in karate, enjoyed music and played the violin.

"He enjoyed his friends like most kids his age do. He was a very happy kid and had the whole world to look forward to -- it's an unfortunate accident," he said. "It's obviously quite a shock (for the family)."

As for the recovery efforts, Mark Reiss said the family understands that the police must wait for conditions to calm down before continuing their search for Daniel.

"He'll be found -- we just need a calm day to get him," he said. "My family is aware of that -- and they know that the police are doing everything they can do."

A friend staying with Daniel's mom, Roseanne, said this morning that "things are very rough right now."

"He was a very outgoing, fun-loving young man," said Grand Haven High School Principal Scott Grimes of Reiss. "He had a number of friends, a very popular kid. It's a shame."

This is the third pier-related incident reported in Grand Haven within four months.

In August, a 17-year-old Norton Shores resident, Scott Allen Smith, was pulled out of the choppy waters after he had been jumping off the south pierhead. He died the following day.

About three weeks later, 17-year-old Andy Fox, of Grand Haven, was swimming with a friend at Grand Haven State Park

when a current pulled him out into the lake. His body was found two days later in the area where he and his friend, Beau Rycenga, had been swimming.

Tribune writer Gena Kaiser and The Holland Sentinel contributed to this story.

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