

Fort Kent merchant drowns

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FORT KENT - Norman "Bim" Ouellette, a Fort Kent businessman and community leader, drowned in a boating accident Sunday afternoon while returning home with friends after a weekend of camping not far from the Maine Public Reserve Land near Deboullie Mountain.

Game wardens with the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, relatives and friends searched Sunday and part of Monday for Ouellette in the cold waters of Third Chase Pond in T14 R9 in northwestern Maine.

Ouellette's body was recovered at 2:45 p.m. Monday by warden divers in 32 feet of water about 40 yards from shore.

Ouellette had been at a camp he owns with several friends. He was camping last weekend with his son-in-law Justin Dubois, Dubois' father, David Dubois, and a friend, Phil Roy, all of the Fort Kent area.

According to warden Sgt. Dan Menard, the accident happened about 12:30 p.m. Sunday as the party was leaving the area. They were in a 14-foot-long boat that was capsized by rough waters on the pond.

Menard said the weather was poor at the time, and a wave hit the bow of the boat, capsizing it. The three other men made it to shore and walked back to their camp. Menard said Monday that Sunday's wind chill was not hospitable.

It was nearly 9 p.m. by the time the trio made it out of the woods to call law enforcement officials. Menard did not know the temperature of the water in the pond but said it is normally very cold at this time of year. The roads in the area were snow- and ice-covered.

Wardens used divers, a fixed-wing aircraft and watercraft in their search Monday. Divers arrived at the scene at 11:30 a.m. Monday and found Ouellette just more than three hours later.

The boaters were not wearing life jackets, which were in the boat.

The loss left a grieving St. John Valley community Monday.

Ouellette, owner of Quigley's Building Supply, was known throughout the area and beyond. He was a member of the board of trustees of Northern Maine Medical Center, the University of Maine at Fort Kent board of visitors, and a former member of the Fort Kent Rotary Club.

He was a close friend to many and known as a compassionate human being. Ouellette leaves a wife, two daughters and an extended family in the St. John Valley. He was a native of Frenchville where his parents, Norman and Stella Ouellette, still reside. He also leaves two sisters.

Barry Ouellette, a Fort Kent logger and friend of Ouellette's, said Monday the loss is deep.

"He was a four-season friend with whom I did everything, from fishing, hunting, canoeing and playing cards," said Barry Ouellette, who was reached on his way home from the scene of the accident late Monday afternoon. "This is a tremendous personal loss.

"We will miss him for a long time," he said. "This hasn't really hit yet because we've been out straight, all night and day."

Norman Fournier, executive director of Fish River Rural Health Center and president of the NMMC board of trustees, said the area has lost a great friend and civic leader.

"We've lost a community leader, a friend and a caring and compassionate man who would give anybody the shirt off his back," Fournier, who was visibly emotional, said Monday afternoon. "He was generous, civic-minded, and always ready and willing to help out.

"He always did what was best for the community and the people he served," Fournier said. "He will be missed a lot, and I have nothing but praise for the man."

Fournier said Norman Ouellette was a friend to everyone who knew him because he was there for all of them, all the time.

Quigley's, his business, is a more than 50-year-old building supply company in Fort Kent. It was owned previously by Donald Quigley, Ouellette's late father-in-law, who hired Ouellette in 1978. The Main Street company has 15 employees.

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