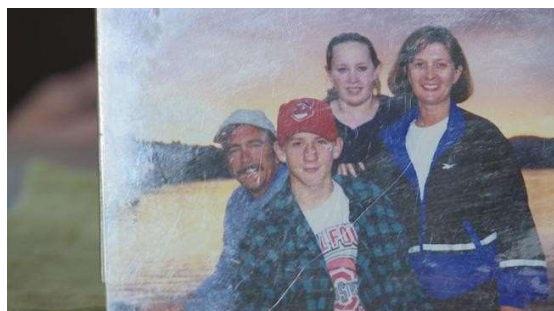
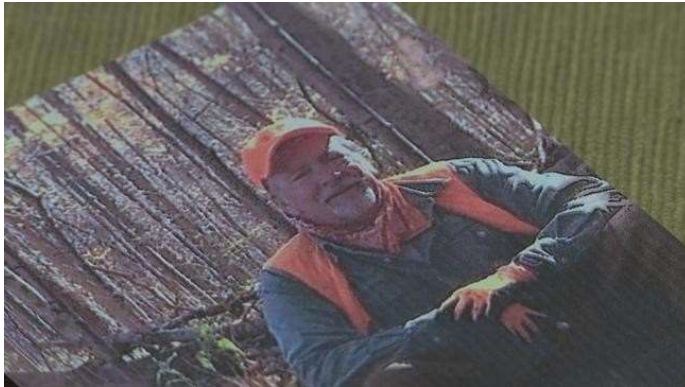


Family opens up after father drowns saving man's best friend

by JACKIE OROZCO, WSYX/WTTE
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Joseph Charles Crites, also known as Joe, was 67 years old and a dedicated family man. (Courtesy Crites family)

COLUMBUS, Ohio ([WSYX](#)/[WTTE](#)) - Joseph "Joe" Charles Crites was 67 years old and a dedicated family man.

"That classic sense of humor -- he truly was one of the funniest people God put on this Earth and we will miss that," said Crites' widow Carole.

Joe Crites took his chocolate lab, Brookie, out for a walk at Antrim Park Thursday morning. When they approached a low-head dam, Brookie jumped in and Crites went after her.

"He died the way he lived, selfless, helping other people, that's just who he was," said Crites' adult son Kenneth. "On top of being my dad, he honestly was my best friend."

Joe's other best friend was his dog, Brookie. "The love for that dog was immeasurable," said Crites' daughter Keely.

That's why the two were inseparable and he gave his life rescuing Brookie when she jumped in the river on Thursday.

"We discussed this scenario before, like if the dog got trapped he's like, 'I'm going on after her,'" said Kenneth.

First responders had a hard time getting to Joe because of the low-head dam at Antirm Park. They needed two boats to get to him out of the water.

"Firefighters, rescuers have gone in and have gotten pulled into a location, a low-head dam, and then they now become victims, so it's (a) very, very dangerous operation," said Worthington Fire Chief John Bailot.

"I obviously agree how it turned out, dumb decision to go in the water, but I fully in my heart know that my dad died saving a member of our family, that's how the dog was viewed," stated Kenneth.

For years, a non-profit group, Friends of the Lower Olentangy, has tried to get rid of these types of dams.

"It's a hidden drowning machine that people don't understand," said chairwoman Laura Fay.

The group wants to make the areas around the Olentangy River safer but it costs a lot of money.

"To take out this dam (like the one in Worthington) would be \$20 million because there is a sewer line running underneath," said Fay.

But the Crites said Joe did what any of them would do and save their beloved pet no matter what.

"Again, if he had to do it over, he would do the same thing, we will miss him. Do we question his judgement? Hmm-mm, but we understand it," said Carole.

We noticed Brookie definitely missed her daddy, too.



Animal control officers returned Brookie to her family on Thursday. But Brookie's mom said it took a while to coax her out of the cage because she'd clearly been traumatized. (WSYX/WTTE)

"It's going to be a void that's going to be impossible to fill," said Kenneth.

Animal control officers returned Brookie to her family on Thursday. But Brookie's mother said it took a while to coax her out of the cage because she'd clearly been traumatized.