

Student, wrestler drowns in kayaking accident

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By Angie Peck

The body of University of Nebraska at Omaha student and former wrestler Jesse Greise was found shortly after 4 p.m. Friday, just west of the Washington Street Bridge in Papillion.

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For almost a day and a half, Ralston dive team members along with other volunteers searched the West Papillion Creek, as friends and family watched.

Greise, 21, and friend Josh Rothanzl were kayaking Thursday down the creek before coming to a 4 to 5 foot drop under the east part of the Washington Street Bridge. Rothanzl was able to safely exit the creek before the drop, but Greise did not see the drop off in time and was pulled under by the strong current. Rothanzl jumped into the water after Greise but was unable to save him.

After an hour and a half, Greise's kayak surfaced but there was still no sign of Greise. Ralston Fire and Rescue members along with

volunteers searched until 10 p.m. before having to quit for the night because of rain and darkness.

During the search, Bob Thomas, a Ralston Dive Team captain, was pinned against the drop-off and his mask sucked off by the current. As a result, no other divers entered the water Thursday. Thomas was taken to Midlands Community Hospital in good condition.

Friday morning, searching resumed at dawn, and tactics were devised to help stop the heavy downfall of water where the rescuers were searching. Two cranes were brought in, one holding a thin 8×8 foot board of wood and the other holding a 3×3 foot cube of logs. The objects were used to decrease the amount and pressure of the water so divers could enter the water again. A dam was created half a mile north of the bridge to lower the amount and pressure of the water enough that divers were able to reenter the water. Just after 3:30 p.m. Friday, the Papillion Mayor announced to the crowd of family, friends and media that the search party was almost positive that the Greise was not located in the waters just under the drop off.

As rescuers took a break, a group of Greise's friends and family walked down to the flood plain surrounding the creek and located Greise's body.

"It was the way Jesse would have wanted it to be," Jesse's father, Patrick Greise, explained. "He would have wanted us to find him."

Small memorials were located on the bridge and at 168th and Dodge Streets, where Greise used to sell vegetables to help save money for college.

"We are the Champions," "Amazing Grace" and "I Will Remember You" played out of a truck's speakers leading a group of more than 200 people as they walked from the Papillion Fire House down under the bridge where Greise went missing Thursday.

The walk ended with friends and family of Greise gathered under the bridge to pay respects and remember the 21-year old who touched

so many people in his short life. Greise was a wrestler at Skutt Catholic High School and at UNO from 2002-2003 until injuries ended his career.

At the vigil, Patrick Greise addressed the crowd, sharing memories of his son and urging the crowd to live as his son did and see Jesse as an example for their lives.

As the family left the group, they threw white roses and carnations into the creek, saying, "We love you, Jesse!"

Greise's funeral is scheduled for 10 a.m. today at Saint Wenceslaus, 15353 Pacific St.

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