

Young swimmer dies off North Cove

Rescuers saw 20-year-old but couldn't reach him in time

By NATALIE ST. JOHN
EO Media Group

NORTH COVE, Wash. — A young Snohomish County man who disappeared while swimming in North Cove on Sunday is presumed dead.

Connor Kim Le, 20, disappeared while rescuers were trying to reach him, Chief Criminal Deputy Pat Matlock of the Pacific County Sheriff's Office said.

The investigation is still underway, Matlock said.

According to a social media profile, Le was a student at Everett Community College. He was apparently staying with friends from Marysville and Lake Stevens in a vacation home in the "Washaway Beach" area, Matlock said. At some point on Sunday evening, Le and some of his friends — all men in their early 20s — decided to go swimming. They went into the water shortly before low tide, when waves were about 3 feet tall.

Just before 7 p.m., Pacific County 911 dispatchers received a call from a woman who said a man was struggling in the water near Willow Lane. The woman said one of his friends was going into the water to try to help him.

Like much of North Cove, Willow Lane is subject to the severe erosion that has already destroyed several streets and dozens of homes. The constantly changing beach conditions, debris, remote location and powerful current make for extremely dangerous swimming conditions, Matlock said.

A fast response

A deputy was already in the area, so he was able to respond quickly. He spoke with the person who made the report and



EO Media Group/File Photo

Washington's North Cove beach area is where a Snohomish County, Washington, man apparently drowned while swimming with friends Sunday evening.

called the U.S. Coast Guard, which dispatched a helicopter and a boat. According to the deputy's report, once the swimmers were well away from shore, the combination of cold water, fatigue and a strong rip current made it difficult for them to make it back to the beach. The other men made it back, but Le struggled to make any progress toward the shore.

"He swam out too far," Matlock said.

Almost rescued

Initially, the deputy could see Le roughly 150 yards offshore. When the Coast Guard helicopter arrived, he used his radio to guide the pilot toward Le. The helicopter personnel spotted Le, and tried to direct the arriving boat to the right

spot. However, by that point, Le had been in the water for about an hour. At the time, air and water temperatures were both in the mid-50s. According to a Coast Guard publication, most people can only survive about one or two hours in those conditions.

Oregon jobless rate drops to 3.6 percent

Associated Press

PORTLAND — Oregon's record-low unemployment rate keeps setting new records.

The state Employment Department said the jobless rate for May was 3.6 percent, a slight drop from April's record-low rate of 3.7 percent. The U.S. employment rate for May was 4.3 percent.

Another unemployment measure, known as U-6, fell to 7.7 percent in May — down from 10.5 percent a year ago. The figure includes discouraged workers who stopped looking as well as part-time workers who want but can't get full-time jobs.

Job gains were widespread among major industries, with construction and manufacturing leading the way.

Meanwhile, Oregon's labor force hit a record-high, rising above 2.1 million workers for the first time.

After about 20 minutes, the deputy saw Le disappear beneath the water. A person in the helicopter reported that Le was "clearly underwater and not moving."

Just as the rescuers in the boat located Le, the tide turned, and quickly dragged him out of sight.

"The tide was shifting, and I think (Le) submerged more. It got to where they couldn't find him, Matlock said. "They continued to search until about 10, and then ceased due to lighting conditions."

Common factors

Le's death involved several factors that appear to be common in local beach drownings. A 2014 Chinook Observer analysis found that virtually all people involved in local fatal or near-fatal incidents are from out of town. Most come from inland communities, an indication that lack of knowledge about ocean swimming conditions may be a major contributor to these incidents. The majority of victims are male. Younger males are especially vulnerable.

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