

Team Wesley now active on Lake Cumberland

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A new dive rescue team in the area is poised to become one of the best, if not the best, in the state, according to members of that team.

The Jamestown Fire Department's dive rescue team, known now as Team Wesley, came to be earlier this year after a combined effort among the department and Carl and Doris Marotzke in honor of their son, Wesley Watkins. Watkins drowned in Lake Cumberland in June of last year after falling off a dock at Jamestown Marina and hitting his head and Carl and Doris have set up the Wesley Watkins Foundation in his memory.

There were no rescue divers locally that could have responded to the incident and Jamestown Fire Chief Tony Wright said if there would have been, it is possible that Watkins could have been saved. With that in mind, the Marotzkes took it upon themselves to help establish the foundation and fund the dive team on donations.

Watkins's family visited from Cincinnati each summer and he grew up on the making many friends at Jamestown Marina that were deeply saddened upon his passing.

"Shortly after the accident happened several of his dock mates started contacting me about the possibility of starting a dive team on site," Wright said. Then back in May the Marotzkes reestablished contact with the department and let them know about the foundation and that they would like to help them out.

"What our vision and our hopes are is to be able to provide rapid response, rapidly deployable dive team," Wright said. "You've got a golden hour, if you can get in the water, to make a rescue. We realize that you can't get to all cases within an hour but there is a chance, in cases like Wesley's, that a rescue is possible."

Wright said he wanted to be able to provide families with a chance and a hope so that they have done everything possible to turn that tragedy around.

Martin Wesley, a diver on Team Wesley, said the dive team recently completed a three-day training trip to Bowling Green, Ohio at Portage Quarry as well as another quarry in Gilboa, Ohio just 40 miles from there.

He said the group was able to attain several important certifications, including wreck diving, night diving, underwater navigation, dry suit specialty and deep dive specialty.

"All of these were attained through instructor Steve Ritchey, a public safety diver with the West Milton Fire Department in Ohio," he said. "All of our certifications came through the Professional Association of Dive Instructors, which he was a member of."

Since then, Wesley said the dive team has gotten back into the pool and started the public safety side of training, which they are still involved in.

"We're very much in our infant stages," He said. "Tony and I have been working very hard here lately developing our standard operating procedures."

He also said the team was currently in the process of researching affiliations in the state of Kentucky as to get their presence established here and be available for public safety grants as well as receiving the expensive gear to equip the divers. All the divers are wearing anywhere from \$6,000 to \$8,000 worth of equipment when in the water.

"Our objective is to be the best public safety dive team in the United States, that's what our goal is," Wesley said. "We want to provide the people of this area a peace of mind, so to speak."

One day, the team hopes to be able to purchase a new boat that's side scan sonar capable as well.

"Carl is right now in the process of buying a dive truck that we could all place our dive gear on," Wesley said. "We would have it in a constant state of readiness as to where we would have rapid deployment."

He said the team has been extremely lucky that Carl and Doris have worked so diligently in seeing the dive team come together.

"They've very much become a part of our family at the fire department," Wesley said. "Essentially we're all one big family."

Wright said the Marotzkas are driven by a desire to see this dive team form and become the best it could possibly be.

"I think they see this as an opportunity to turn something negative into a positive so his death wasn't in vain," he said.

Wesley said that while the dive rescue members of Team Wesley are volunteers, they have made it priority one to see the team succeed.

The Wesley Watkins Foundation is funded solely on donations that go toward equipping and helping Team Wesley in any way possible. The Team Wesley website can be found at www.jamestowndiverrescueteam.com and was donated by Sogeti USA LLC, Wright said.

By clicking on the link and visiting the page often, one can help raise money for Team Wesley through Google ads, Wright added.

Team Wesley is made up of dive team captain Martin Wesley, Asst. Fire Chief Michael Rush, Asst. Fire Chief Jeff Landers, Chris Knifley, Billy Bunch, Zach Burton, Michael Clark and Michael Reynolds. Wright, the incident commander, will oversee all fire and dive instances.