

Tragedy on Huron River in Milford

2 drownings and injury to third boater raise safety questions

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Jim and Connie Cipponeri look over the dam at the turbulent waters which claimed the lives of two canoers on Saturday. / Photo by Aileen Wingblad

Written by **Aileen Wingblad**

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The death of two canoers and serious [injury](#) of one kayaker in two separate incidents near a dam along the Huron River in Milford on Saturday has officials evaluating whether or not additional safety measures are needed for the prohibited section of the river where the accidents occurred.

The first incident, which happened shortly before 1 p.m., claimed the life of 16-year-old John Przydatek of Harrison Township, who died after his canoe flipped in the rapidly swirling current near the dam, which is part of the village's wastewater treatment system. Milford

resident Douglas Killingbeck, 48, described as an expert canoeist, was killed after leaping into the water in an attempt to save the teenager.

He, too, was trapped below the surface by the strong turbulence and drowned.

"He gave his life trying to do the best he could to help someone out," said Milford Police Sgt. Matt Brumm.

Police said Przydatek and a 16-year-old companion, who were on a canoe outing with a church group, ignored warning signs and intentionally paddled into the foaming waters on the western side of the dam. After their canoe flipped, both boys were drawn under the surface. One of them was tossed to calmer waters and was able to climb out. He sustained facial lacerations



Doug Killingbeck

Services scheduled for Killingbeck

Douglas Dale Killingbeck of Milford and formerly of Au Gres passed away on the river that he loved May 21, 2011. He was 48 years old.

Survived by his beloved wife Karen; loving daughters Brianna & Natalie; [parents](#) Dale & Patricia Killingbeck, brother Dennis Killingbeck, grandmother Alice Dittenber; parents-in-law John (Joyce) Kilby; brother-in-law John

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(Robyn) Kilby; nieces & nephews Jill (Rob Innes) Killingbeck, Devon Rosebrough, Megan & Britney Killingbeck, Ryley, Logan, Cayden Kilby; extended family, countless friends & fellow [canoe](#) paddlers across Michigan.

Funeral Service from Christ Lutheran Church, 620 General Motors Rd., Milford, Wednesday 12 Noon. Gathering beginning at 10:30 AM. Rev. Richard E. Pape to officiate. Burial Milford Memorial Cemetery. Friends may visit at Lynch & Sons Funeral Home, 404 E. Liberty St., Milford Tuesday 2-9 PM.

Memorial contributions to the family are appreciated.

For further [information](#), call Lynch & Sons, Milford at 248.684.6645 or visit [www.LynchFuneralDirectors.com](#).

and bruising but required no emergency treatment at the scene.

Milford firefighters, outfitted with water rescue suits and tethered to a cable, eventually recovered both bodies after they surfaced within an hour. Przydatek and Killingbeck were pronounced dead at the scene.

Firefighters also recovered the teens' and Killingbeck's life jackets in the river, apparently torn off by the strong current, noted Milford Fire Chief Larry Waligora. Both canoes were demolished.

Several hours later — moments after police cleared that portion of the river for boaters — a 30-year-old kayaker from [Commerce Township](#) narrowly escaped death after paddling into the same turbulence near the dam and flipping into the water. His companions were able to pull him to safety and performed CPR before emergency personnel arrived. He was transported to a hospital where he was placed in the intensive care unit. He was expected to survive.

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