



## Walled Lake death drives authorities to stress safety

### Novi man drowns after being thrown from boat

By **SHAUN BYRON** Of The Oakland Press

The summer boating season has had some close calls, but Monday's drowning in Novi has law enforcement warning boaters to use proper safety precautions out on the water.

"We've had some real close calls and unfortunately, this fatal boating accident kind of topped that off," said Sgt. Dan Toth, who heads the Oakland County Sheriff's Marine Division.

Divers found the body of Anthony Curtis, 38, of Novi several hours after he, his fiancée and her 17-month-old son were tossed from the boat Monday afternoon on Walled Lake.

None of them was wearing a life jacket.

By law, anyone under age 6 is required to wear an approved personal flotation device while on board a boat.

Curtis' body was recovered shortly after 8 p.m. According to statements made by his fiancée, the boat hit a wake about 400 to 500 yards off the northern shore of the lake. She told police all three of them were thrown from the boat.

A woman living on West Lake Drive, east of Pontiac Trail, heard screams for help, got into a kayak and began racing toward them.

Tom Harvey, who also lives on West Lake Drive, said he was inside when a neighbor knocked on his door, telling him of the situation.

Harvey said he got into his rowboat in an attempt to help with the rescue.

"A kayak moves a lot faster than a rowboat," he said, adding the woman had reached them first. When he reached them, he and the woman placed the mother and baby in his boat and made their way to shore. "They were both in shock," he said, adding thankfully that the baby was breathing. Curtis, however, had disappeared while yelling for help. Novi police would not release the name of the woman in the kayak. Both the fiancée and baby were hospitalized and are reported to be doing well.

Novi police Deputy Chief Thomas Lindberg said the boat didn't appear to have capsized — the fishing gear and personal items were still inside.

Lindberg said there have only been a few incidents of injuries or accidents on Walled Lake or the smaller lakes in Novi.

Toth said the cause of drownings and boating accidents is more often than not that someone overlooked basic safety concepts.

These include not using personal flotation devices, drinking alcohol and recklessly operating a boat while out on the water.

"Many of these issues can be resolved with a boating class," he said.

The department offers instruction, which isn't required of everyone who holds a boating license in the state of

Michigan, but is highly recommended, Toth said.

"It's six hours of instruction, it's conducted year round and throughout the county," he said.

Since providing classes, the amount of accidents that happen on the lakes every year has been cut in half.

Oakland County Sheriff Mike Bouchard said police try to make safety the cornerstone in their outreach to boaters.

"If you look at the fatalities, 70 percent of these boating accidents happen because they didn't have any formal safety training," he said.

Education and taking proactive steps, such as wearing a personal flotation device, can go a long way toward preventing tragedies, Bouchard said.

"We just encourage people to think safety first, so a tragedy doesn't end up ruining what would otherwise be a happy day," he said.