



Media information

Memorial donation from Kitchener family to the Cook-Rees Memorial Fund provides rescue swimmer equipment for OPP

Family and friends of Steve Kurt, a Kitchener man who drowned in June 2007, today joined singer/songwriter Loreena McKennitt and members of the Ontario Provincial Police Underwater Search and Recovery Unit on the shores of Silver Lake in Waterloo Park. The informal event, held at the Grist Mill, was held to spotlight the donation of 13 rescue swimmer kits for the OPP.

The funds to purchase the equipment were originally raised at the time of the fatal boating incident that occurred on Bernard Lake, north of Huntsville. Mr. Kurt's boat had been discovered empty and trolling in circles, two fishing lines still attached, after he failed to return from a summer evening fishing excursion.

Despite extensive searching by the OPP Underwater Search and Recovery Unit the team was initially unable to locate the 43-year-old man before they were called away to another incident. The community raised \$11,000 to assist the family to carry on the search privately, but fortunately the dive team was able to return three weeks later. Using side-scan sonar equipment that had been donated by The Cook-Rees Memorial Fund some years before, the team was able to recover the body from the bottom of the lake.

The family, grateful for this resolution, decided that the funds raised by the community should be entrusted to The Cook-Rees Fund as a donation in memory

of Steve Kurt. Loreena McKennitt had established the Fund in 1998 after the loss of her fiancée Ron Rees, his brother Rick and their friend Greg Cook in a sailing incident in Georgian Bay.

“We wanted to ensure that the wishes of the family to provide a meaningful contribution could be met,” said Ms. McKennitt.

The donation means that the OPP will be equipped with 13 sets of rescue swimmer equipment — specifically fitted for each individual member of the organization’s dive team. The light-weight equipment allows exceptional freedom of movement, and can be donned rapidly in the event of a rescue emergency.

The new equipment will allow the OPP to increase their attendance at safety demonstrations — especially those that highlight the effects of cold water shock and the importance of wearing lifejackets. Just as importantly, it will allow the OPP to provide emergency rescue services at events with large numbers of people on or near bodies of water. The donation supports the vision of the OPP: "Safe Communities...A Secure Ontario."

“Our family was overwhelmed and truly grateful for all the generous donations that were received in an effort to find Steve,” said Lori Temple, Steve Kurt’s sister. “It brings us some peace and comfort to know we can help the OPP, through the Cook-Rees Fund, with future rescues.”

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Further information:

Stacey Clark, Cook-Rees Memorial Fund
416-595-5418
info@cookreesfund.com

Wayne MacPherson, Unit Commander, Underwater Search and Recovery Unit, Ontario
Provincial Police
705-687-1307
wayne.macpherson@ontario.ca

Websites:

www.cookreesfund.com
www.opp.ca/specresteam
www.quinlanroad.com

For more information on water safety, lifejackets and the effects of cold water, visit
www.wearalifejacket.com

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