

Snowmobile crash claims life of Town of Port man

Written by KRISTYN HALBIG ZIEHM
Wednesday, 05 March 2014 20:07

Relative says Schlenvogt, 37, died in 'freak' accident along Upper Michigan road

A snowmobiling trip to Upper Michigan turned tragic early Sunday when a 37-year-old Town of Port Washington man was killed in an accident.

Chad Schlenvogt died about 2 a.m. March 2 in a rural area of Dickinson County, Mich., less than a mile from the Wisconsin state line, according to authorities.

He was driving on the west side of Pine Mountain Road in Breitung Township when he struck a guardrail on the west side of the road, according to the Michigan State Police.

The snowmobile overturned and Schlenvogt was ejected.

A passing motorist found him lying on the shoulder of the road, which is well traveled, probably within minutes of the accident, according to the state police. He was unresponsive, and attempts to revive him were unsuccessful.

The accident has stunned many people in the town and city of Port, where Schlenvogt was well known and his extended family is active in local government.



Chad Schlenvogt

Schlenvogt's wife Jenny is the Town of Port Washington clerk, his brother-in-law Jim Rychtik is a town supervisor, and his uncle, Lee Schlenvogt, is the Ozaukee County Board chairman and a former Town of Port chairman.

Schlenvogt was a fixture at Town Board meetings and was a member of the Zoning Board of Appeals.

The accident has also left people shaking their heads in disbelief. Schlenvogt was an

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experienced snowmobiler, Rychtik said, who knew and respected his limits.

“It was just one of those freak, freak things,” he said. “Everything would have to line up perfectly for him to get hurt, and it did. If he hit an inch over, he’d probably have a big bruise right now and be joking about it.”

Schlenvogt wasn’t originally supposed to be up north, Rychtik said. He and a group of friends intended to go snow goose hunting in the southern United States, but the trip was cancelled because of weather.

Schlenvogt and two friends, Tom Didier and Jordy Schwanz, decided to go snowmobiling up north instead, Rychtik said.

“The snow up there is just amazing,” he said.

The trio left for Florence County on Thursday and planned to return Sunday night, Rychtik said.

They arrived late Thursday, then took a 180-mile snowmobile trip to Eagle River on Friday, he said.

On Saturday, they stuck around the cabin, then decided to drive to Pine Mountain Ski Resort about 10 miles from where they were staying to watch a snowmobile hill-climbing contest. They spent the day there.

The group returned to the cabin, then decided to go back to the resort, Rychtik said.

But when they headed back to the cabin, one of the snowmobiles wouldn’t start. Didier and Schwanz decided to ride together, and Schlenvogt drove on ahead, Rychtik said.

Rychtik said he believes Schlenvogt, who was familiar with the area, took a shortcut to bypass a two- to three-mile jog in the snowmobile trail around a ravine. That shortcut apparently took him along Pine Mountain Road, which is a wide road with snow along the edges of the shoulder.

“What happened next is anyone’s guess,” Rychtik said.

“I think the ski possibly caught either on a big chunk of snow or the edge of the guardrail,” Rychtik said, pushing the snowmobile up the rail just enough to tip it, ejecting Schlenvogt.

When Didier and Schwanz returned to the cabin, they were surprised that Schlenvogt wasn’t waiting for them, Rychtik said. They tried calling him, but got no answer and started panicking, he said. They thought about going out to look for him, but their snowmobile was out of gas and the truck they had driven wouldn’t start.

“They didn’t have a clue where Chad was,” Rychtik said.

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It was only when authorities contacted them later that they discovered what had happened.

Authorities told the family they believe Schlenvogt hit the handlebars when he was ejected, causing his death, Rychtik said.

Rychtik said he does not believe speed was a factor, noting Schlenvogt was found near the snowmobile.

The snowmobile, he added, is intact and operable.

Although the state police said alcohol is believed to have been a factor in the crash, Rychtik said Schlenvogt generally did not drink or drank minimally when driving a snowmobile.

A funeral Mass for Schlenvogt will be held at 7 p.m. Monday at St. Peter of Alcantara Catholic Church in Port Washington.

An education fund for his two young children has been set up at Kohler Credit Union.

A complete obituary for Schlenvogt can be found in this edition of Ozaukee Press.