

04-25-2015 Gadsden AL- Vicky Ryan – VFF Low Head Dam Rescue –Neg Homicide

AL - Gadsden - Big Wills Creek, Gadsden, AL https://krcproject.groups.et.byu.net/browse.php	
Incidents	
Date:	25 - Apr - 2015
Fatalities:	2
Description:	On 25 April 2015 at approximately 11:00am CDT a 25 year old man kayaking with a friend or family members went missing after he kayaked over a low head dam on Big Wills Creek in Gadsden, Alabama. His blue kayak could be seen recirculating in the backwash of the dam, but he was no where to be seen. Rescue and emergency personnel were dispatched. Members of Gadsden Fire and the Etowah County Rescue Squad deployed two john boats ("rescue boats"). There were no safety lines attached to the boats. Rescue personnel were not wearing helmets, and lacked safety lines. The boats capsized spilling nine rescue workers into the backwash. Four of the nine rescue workers were transported to the hospital with water related injuries. Rescue attempts were suspended due to unfavorable conditions. One of the rescue workers succumbed to her injuries later on the evening on 25 April 2015. The body of the 25 year old missing man was found on 26 April 2015 at 10:30am approximately 300 yards below where he went missing.
Web Documentation:	http://www.wvtm13.com/news/rescuer-dies-during-search-for-missing-kayaker/32580260

Rescue squad member dies on mission

<http://www.americanwhitewater.org/content/Accident/detail/accidentid/3927/>

April 25, 2015 By Donna Thornton Times Staff Writer

A member of the Etowah County Rescue Squad died Saturday night, hours after the boat she was in capsized during a mission on Big Wills Creek near the old steel plant pump station off Brooke Avenue.

Vicky Houston Ryan, 46, was pronounced dead at 10:25 p.m. Saturday, Etowah Coroner Michael Head said.

Rescue squad members were called in to drag the creek after a kayaker was swept out of his boat near the dam. The kayaker was presumed to have drowned, according to Gadsden Assistant Fire Chief Robert Maltbie.

Maltbie said two kayakers were in the water near a low dam about 11:07 a.m. when one was swept out of his kayak. The other called for help.

He said the person was presumed drowned and responders continued their search. Maltbie said the Etowah County Rescue Squad was conducting dragging operations late Saturday afternoon when one of its flat-bottom boats got too close to the dam and the turbulent water swamped it, throwing the squad members into the water. A second squad boat moved in to try to get the members and it, too, capsized. "We had nine people in the water," Maltbie said. Four went to local hospitals, he said, and where Ryan later died. All squad members were pulled from the water, he said, but the kayaker remains missing.

Fire department personnel were going to be on the scene overnight, he said, but water operations halted as nightfall approached. "We're not going to be putting anyone in the water tonight. The water is extremely high and the current is very strong," Maltbie said. "These lowhead dams like this one create so much turbulence in the water." Getting near them is very dangerous.

Update | 1:30 p.m. Sunday

The Gadsden Fire Department says they found the body of a kayaker missing in Big Wills Creek since Saturday. Assistant Chief Jim Matlock said after the rescue squad suspended their operations Saturday night the Fire Department kept units on the scene to patrol the banks of the creek. Matlock said they spotted the body around 10:30 Sunday morning and then began a recovery operation. Matlock said it took crews about an hour to retrieve the body.

Summary :

The Etowah County Coroner says the kayaker is 25 year old Dakota Brett Crandall. The Coroner also said a rescue worker looking for Crandall Saturday night passed away after the rescue teams boats overturned. That rescue worker is 46 year old Vicky Ryan.

Update | 6:30 p.m.

The search for a missing kayaker in Big Wills Creek in Gadsden has been suspended for the night, ABC 33/40's Sherrie Evans reports. During the search, two Etowah County rescue teams became stranded in the water after their boats overturned. Four people were taken to the hospital.

Body of missing kayaker recovered in Gadsden



By [William Thornton](#)

on April 26, 2015 PM

Crews remained at the creek overnight after rescue efforts yesterday resulted in [three injuries](#) and a [fatality among members](#) of the Etowah County Rescue Squad. A day after he disappeared, the body of a missing Etowah County man was recovered from Big Wills Creek. Etowah County Coroner Michael Head said Dakota Brett Crandall, 25, was pronounced dead at 11:12 this morning. Gadsden Assistant Fire Chief Jim Matlock said Crandall's body was found about 300 yards from where he went under Saturday morning while kayaking with relatives.

Matlock said crews walked the creek bank this morning and Crandall's body was spotted about 10:30 a.m. about 25 feet from the bank. It took about 45 minutes to recover the body, as crews with life vests were tied to ropes along the shore and went into the water. The area had a depth of up to 15 feet, he said, but the body was spotted in about five feet of water.

"The water was still pretty unsafe," Matlock said. "It's well above flood stage in some areas."

On Saturday, rescue squad worker Vicky Ryan, 46, died after she and three rescue squad coworkers were injured when two boats capsized during a search on the creek.

Crandall went missing near an old low head dam that was once used to pump water into the Gulf States steel mill nearby.

One of the boats got too close to the dam and was swept over the side. The second boat soon followed and nine Rescue Squad workers were cast into the creek. Members of the Gadsden Fire Department and the Etowah County Sheriff's Office assisted in rescue efforts.

Detailed Description:

Deputies with the Etowah County Sheriff's Office and the county's Emergency Management Agency today seized equipment from the Etowah County Rescue Squad, driving off from the squad's headquarters with spotlights, thermal imaging equipment and two trailers.

Three members of the agency also had to turn in their deputies' badges.

It was the latest body blow to the rescue squad, which has been working with law enforcement in the county for more than 50 years. A rescue squad member, [Vicky Ryan](#), died in April during a [search for a drowned kayaker](#) on Big Wills Creek. Three other squad members were hospitalized, after two of its boats overturned on the creek. That incident is currently under investigation by the Alabama Law Enforcement Agency.

Rescue squad equipment seized

The Etowah County Sheriff's Office seized several pieces of equipment Tuesday, June 30, 2015, at the rescue squad's headquarters in Gadsden. (William Thornton / wthornton@al.com)

But since then, the squad has been notified by several agencies that it is not permitted to operate with them. That includes Gadsden Fire, the Etowah County Fire Association and EMA. Rescue Squad Capt. David Kelton, who has only been in his position for less than a month, said today that the squad is no longer receiving 911 calls.

When a search began earlier this month for a drowning victim in the Coosa near Southside, ALEA called [the Cherokee County Rescue Squad](#) to assist in the search rather than Etowah County.

Other entities, such as the Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co., have informed the squad that it is not allowed to participate in events, and both Gadsden and Rainbow City have denied the squad permits for fundraising roadblocks.

The seizure, Sheriff Todd Entrekin said, involved equipment from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Chief Deputy Michael Barton said once the squad could no longer use the equipment in Etowah County, it had to be reallocated to agencies that could deploy it, due to federal regulations. Kelton said he was notified on Friday that he had four days to prepare paperwork and turn the equipment over. The trailers were hitched and driven off this afternoon. "I want to do what's required," Kelton said. "I want to move forward."

Entrekin said he had worked with the rescue squad for all of his 33 years in law enforcement and has been "involved in hundreds of missions," from helping in searches to recovering evidence.

"In its day, it was the best thing in the county," he said. "But times have changed and needs have changed." With volunteer fire departments and more access to equipment and training, he said, the squad is not as needed.

Three years ago, the rescue squad approached the Sheriff's Office about working cooperatively, sharing equipment and training, Entekin said. This would have made the agency an auxiliary, like the mounted unit or crisis chaplain counseling, he said, meaning the rescue squad would control any money raised for its activities. However, the squad's board of directors decided against this.

The investigation into the Big Wills Creek incident will likely head to a grand jury in September.

Kelton said the rescue squad members, who are volunteers, will continue to undergo training over the next few months. Its remaining equipment can be loaned out to neighboring agencies, he said.

"There's a 50-50 chance we'll get our equipment back," Kelton said. "Since the accident, they've put a hold on our activities, but we're still here. We'll survive and we'll be back. We need the people's support more than ever."

Still, losing the equipment was hard to take, he said. "My dad was a charter member in 1961," Kelton said. "I was there when they brought the first piece of equipment."

Search for missing kayaker in Gadsden, Alabama's Big Wills Creek suspended after rescue boats overturn

Posted: Apr 25, 2015 By Ben Culpepper

The search for a missing kayaker in Big Wills Creek in Gadsden has been suspended for the night, ABC 33/40's Sherrie Evans reports. During the search, two Etowah County rescue teams became stranded in the water after their boats overturned. Four people were taken to the hospital. The search for a missing kayaker in Big Wills Creek in Gadsden has stalled after boats carrying Etowah County rescue crews overturned, sending the first responders into the water, ABC 33/40's Sherrie Evans reports.

Firefighters were seen using ropes to pull their colleagues from the water. Four people were later transported to the hospital, one of whom was listed in critical condition. There is still no sign of the kayaker, who authorities say wasn't wearing a life jacket. Watch ABC 33/40 News at 6 p.m. and 10 p.m. for the latest updates on this developing story.

GADSDEN, Alabama -- Rescue crews in Gadsden are searching for a kayaker who went missing in Big Wills Creek. According to a fire department spokesperson, a man fell out of his kayak while paddling down the creek earlier today. Authorities said he wasn't wearing a life jacket. Crews are searching an area of water near Brooke Avenue and

Witness
Narrative:

California Street. Details are limited at this time, but ABC 33/40's Sherrie Evans is at the scene gathering more information.

ETOWAH COUNTY, AL (WBRC) - Two Etowah County Rescue Squad boats capsized while they were searching for a possible drowning victim on Saturday. About nine rescuers were pulled from the water. Several of them were taken to the Riverview Regional Medical Center. Once rescuer recieved a lot of CPR and appears to be in critical condition. Rescuers were searching for a kayaker believed to have capsized while attempting to go over an artificial waterfall near Brook Avenue on Saturday morning. The kayak was still floating in the area when rescuers arrived but the person never resurfaced. Authorities initially responded with one boat but it capsized near the waterfall and the crew fell into the creek. A second boat responded to rescue the first crew but it too feel victim to the waterfall and capsized. The Etowah County Sheriff's Office, Fire Department, Gadsden Police and Attalla Police also responded to the scene.

Rescue worker dies after mishap during kayaker search

April 25, 2015 By **William Thornton**



Big Wills Creek, near the scene of a rescue Saturday, April 25, 2015.

An Etowah County Rescue Squad worker has died as a result of injuries during [a search for a missing kayaker in an Etowah County creek](#). Coroner Michael Head said **Vicky Ryan, 46**, died Saturday night at Riverview Regional Medical Center. Ryan, along with three rescue squad coworkers, was injured when two boats capsized during a search on Big Wills Creek.

Gadsden Assistant Fire Chief Robert Maltbie said a 25-year-old man was out kayaking with family members about 11:07 a.m. in Big Wills Creek near Brooke Avenue when he was swept into the water. The man went missing near an old low head dam that was once used to pump water into the Gulf States steel mill nearby, he said.

The Etowah County Rescue Squad began a search, and employed two rescue boats. One of the boats got too close to the dam and was swept

over the side. The second boat soon followed and nine Rescue Squad workers were cast into the creek. Members of the Gadsden Fire Department and the Etowah County Sheriff's Office assisted in rescue efforts.

One other worker was taken to Riverview, and two more to Gadsden Regional Medical Center. Fire medics have still not located the missing kayaker. Maltbie said workers will maintain a presence in the area overnight and resume searching tomorrow, but will not attempt any more recovery efforts tonight.

Water levels were already high at the creek because of spring rains, which also made the current especially dangerous, Maltbie said.

[Here is a bit more info that, perhaps, helps explain why charges have been brought. Looks like a rather messy, entangled, unhappy situation for all involved.]

<http://www.gadsdentimes.com/article/20151222/NEWS/151229962?p=1&tc=pg><<http://www.gadsdentimes.com/article/20151222/NEWS/151229962?p=1&tc=pg>>

Former rescue squad captain charged with criminally negligent homicide

Another squad member faces theft charges

By Lisa Savage, Times Staff Writer

<<http://www.gadsdentimes.com/personalia/LRogers>>

Conclusions:

Published: Tuesday, December 22, 2015 at 1:31 p.m.

Last Modified: Tuesday, December 22, 2015 at 9:46 p.m.

The former captain of the Etowah County Rescue Squad has been arrested for criminally negligent homicide related to the drowning death of a rescue squad volunteer April 25. Michael Ervin Bettis, 49, Gadsden, was arrested on the misdemeanor charge after he was indicted by an Etowah County grand jury, according to a news release from Sheriff Todd Entrekin. The news release cited state law that a person commits criminally negligent homicide if he or she causes the death of another person by criminal negligence. Entrekin said the Alabama Law Enforcement Agency, marine division, was the lead agency during the investigation. Bettis was held in the Etowah County Detention Center on \$2,500 bond.

Another rescue squad member has been arrested on a felony theft charge after he allegedly was involved in a theft of lights repossessed from the squad after several county agencies stopped using its services following the drowning.

James Charles "Jimmy" Kelton Jr., 62, was charged with first-degree receiving stolen property, a felony, after an incident in September in which a light tower worth \$7,500 was taken from Gadsden City High School, according to Gadsden police reports. The lights were on loan from the city of Gadsden for the Mid-South Marching Festival. When someone went to pick up the lights at the high school, they were gone.

The lights were included in an inventory of equipment repossessed from the rescue squad in June.

The rescue squad had a generator, a flatbed utility trailer, an enclosed utility trailer and thermal imaging device assigned to them by the state's Homeland Security Division. It also had large portable lights operated with a generator and mounted on a trailer owned by the city of Gadsden, which also were repossessed. It is those lights that were reported stolen from the high school three months later.

Kelton was seen with the lights and Gadsden police detectives went to his wrecker business on Forrest Avenue, according to the report. He told detectives he did not have any knowledge about the lights, but it was later determined he had them.

The equipment was repossessed from the rescue squad following a series of events triggered by the drowning death April 25 of Vicky Box Ryan, 46.

Ryan drowned after the boat she was in capsized during a mission on Big Wills Creek off Brooke Avenue.

Volunteers with the rescue squad were among those who responded to the low-head dam at the old steel plant pump station for the recovery of the body of a kayaker who went missing in the water about 11 a.m. April 25.

Gadsden Fire Department officials ordered the rescue squad members to stay out of the water and work only from the bank because of unsafe conditions. Neither fire department personnel nor the sheriff's office dive team members went in the water.

The water was high, but the conditions at the location of a low-head dam also are dangerous. As water goes over the dam, it creates a strong recirculating current at the dam's base. The force can trap boats against

the dam and pull people under the water, even if they are wearing a life vest.

It was determined the rescue mission was to become a body recovery, and Gadsden Fire Chief Stephen Carroll said the rescue squad responded.

"They were told what to do and what not do," he said in June.

Bettis was captain at the time. Despite the instructions, the rescue squad put two boats in the water about 5:30 p.m. One of the boats, then the other, got too close to the dam and capsized. Nine rescue squad members were thrown into the water. Ryan drowned and three others were treated at a hospital. The kayaker's body was recovered the next day.

Following the incident, the ALEA Marine Police division, Etowah County Sheriff's Office, Gadsden Police Department, Gadsden Fire Department and the Etowah County District Attorney's office began an investigation.

That same day, Carroll issued an order that the rescue squad not be permitted to respond or operate within the city of Gadsden.

Another drowning occurred June 14 in the Coosa River, and the following day, a representative from ALEA's Marine Police division gave a directive that the rescue squad was not allowed to respond to incidents on waterways. Entekin followed that directive.

Similar orders were issued in the following days from the Gadsden/Etowah County Emergency Management Agency and Etowah County Fire Association, as well as organizations and companies that previously had used the rescue squad during events

Video: Alabama rescue squad member killed after rescue boats flip at dam during river search

<http://www.statter911.com/2015/04/26/video-alabama-rescue-squad-member-killed-after-rescue-boats-flip-at-dam-during-river-search/>

Apr 26, 2015

UPDATED

We are learning more about Vicky Ryan the member of Alabama's Etowah County Rescue Squad killed when two rescue boats went over a dam during a search operation. It turns out Ryan's husband was on the boat with her.

"All I heard was there was a boat accident and Vicky didn't make it," said Pastor Michael Hengle. That's how the Pastor of Parkway Community Church in Gadsden said he heard about one of his parishoners death.



Hengle said he immediately went to see the family he's ministered for years. "When I sat down with Houston, I looked at him and I could tell he was in shock." Houston is Vicky's husband, Pastor Hengle said he was in the boat with his wife Saturday. "He was taken to the hospital and had a cut on his head and bruises on his side.

Pastor Hengle said Vicky was always helping others, "she is the most giving person I have ever seen in my life. Her whole life was just to give to others, to make others happier."

Maltbie said two kayakers were in the water near a low dam about 11:07 a.m. when one was swept out of his kayak. The other called for help.

He said the person was presumed drowned and responders continued their search. Maltbie said the Etowah County Rescue Squad was conducting dragging operations late Saturday afternoon when one of its flat-bottom boats got too close to the dam and the turbulent water swamped it, throwing the squad members into the water. A second squad boat moved in to try to get the members and it, too, capsized.



**Donna Thorton, Gadsden Times:
(Gadsden Assistant Fire Chief Robert)**

"We had nine people in the water," Maltbie said. Four went to local hospitals, he said, and where Ryan later died.

EARLIER

A member of Alabama's Etowah County Rescue Squad was killed during a search late yesterday (Saturday) morning for a missing kayaker in Big Wills Creek in Gadsden. The member has been identified as 46-year-old Vicky Ryan.

Ryan died and three others were injured after their two rescue boats went over a dam and capsized. The accident happened while a reporter from WCFT-TV was interviewing Etowah County Rescue Squad Captain Mike Bettis and they suddenly heard screaming.

The video is below.

[From Billy Goldfeder via The Secret List:](#)

A 25-year-old man was out kayaking with family members about 1107 hours yesterday (Saturday) in Big Wills Creek when he was swept into the water. The man went missing near an old low head dam that was once used to pump water into the Gulf States steel mill nearby.

The Etowah County Rescue Squad began a search, and employed two rescue boats.



One of the boats got too close to the dam and was swept over the side. The second boat soon followed and nine Rescue Squad workers were cast into the creek. Members of the Gadsden Fire Department and the Etowah County Sheriff's Office assisted in rescue efforts.

One other worker was taken to Riverview, and two more to Gadsden Regional Medical Center. Fire medics have still not located the missing kayaker. Members will maintain a presence in the area overnight and resume searching tomorrow, but will not attempt any more recovery efforts tonight.

Water levels were already high at the creek because of spring rains, which also made the current especially dangerous.

Rescuer dies during search for missing kayaker Boat overturns on Big Wills Creek

<http://www.wvtm13.com/news/rescuer-dies-during-search-for-missing-kayaker/32580260>

Apr 26, 2015

GADSDEN, Ala. —A rescue worker died and three others were hurt when a pair of rescue boats capsized in Big Wills Creek during a search for a missing kayaker. Etowah County officials said Vicky Ryan was pronounced dead Saturday night at Riverview Medical Center in Gadsden.

The two rescue boats overturned in a creek along Brooke Avenue near Interstate 759 on Saturday.

Authorities said strong currents led to the accident, and the search was called off. Investigators said the missing kayaker was attempting to go over a dam. One member of the rescue squad described Ryan as a nice person who was passionate about her job.

"She was one that would always show up to the scene if there is a scene to be shown up on, she was there, a real nice lady," Wayne Garmon said.

First responders did not put any boats in the water to search for the missing kayaker. The search was done above ground.



Body of missing kayaker found, identified in Etowah co.

<http://www.wbrc.com/story/28901682/body-of-missing-kayaker-found-identified-in-etowah-co>

May 3rd 2015 By WBRC Staff

ETOWAH COUNTY, AL (WBRC) -A kayaker reported missing Saturday has been found dead in Big Wills Creek in Etowah County. The kayaker has been identified as Dakota Brett Crandall, a 25 year-old who lived in Southside but was originally is from Utah.

The body was found around 10:30 this morning, some 200 yards from the kayak accident.

One of the rescuers on the recovery mission was killed while searching for Crandall.

Vicky Ryan was pronounced dead just before 10:30 last night at Riverview Regional Medical Center. Coroner Michael Head says the cause of her death is drowning.

Two Etowah County rescue squad boats capsized while they were searching for a possible drowning victim on Saturday.

About nine rescuers were pulled from the water. Several of them were taken to the Riverview Regional Medical Center.

Rescuers were searching for the kayaker believed to have capsized while attempting to go over an artificial waterfall near Brook Avenue on Saturday morning. The kayak was still floating in the area when rescuers arrived.

Authorities initially responded with one boat but it capsized near the waterfall and the crew fell into the creek. A second boat responded to rescue the first crew but it too fell victim to the waterfall and capsized.

The Etowah County Sheriff's Office, Fire Department, Gadsden Police and Attalla Police also responded to the scene.

Equipment seized at Alabama rescue squad that suffered line-of-duty-death

<http://www.statter911.com/2015/07/01/equipment-seized-at-alabama-rescue-squad-that-suffered-line-of-duty-death/>

Jul 1, 2015

Since **two of its boats overturned during a search**, killing one member and injuring three other members, Alabama's Etowah County Rescue Squad has been dealing with a series of difficulties. The most recent yesterday (Tuesday) was the seizure by the Etowah County Sheriff's Office and its Emergency Management Agency of some of the squad's equipment. Among the things removed were spotlights, thermal imaging equipment and two trailers.

The April incident is still under investigation by the Alabama Law Enforcement Agency but since then the squad is no longer receiving 911 calls and is no longer permitted to operate with Gadsden Fire, the Etowah County Fire Association and EMA.

Equipment repossessed from Etowah County Rescue Squad

<http://www.wvtm13.com/news/Equipment-repossessed-from-Etowah-County-Rescue-Squad/33937044>

Jul 01, 2015 By Chip Scarborough



GADSDEN, Ala. —The Etowah County Rescue Squad says it is continuing normal operations after the county repossessed a portion of their equipment.

This week, equipment provided to the rescue squad through a Homeland Security grant was repossessed. After an Etowah County Rescue worker drowned on the job in April, the Gadsden Fire Department and Etowah County Sheriff's Office, as well as other agencies, ordered the Etowah County Rescue Squad not to respond to any incidents in their jurisdictions. Therefore, the rescue equipment wasn't being used.

The Etowah County Sheriff's Office says a dive trailer, utility trailer, extrication lift airbags, and a thermal image unit were all repossessed.

"You know, the point in repossession was not anything to do with the investigation," Chief Deputy Michael Barton said. "The point in obtaining that equipment and reallocating was that if the rescue squad is not able or not allowed to respond to any other jurisdiction in Etowah County by order of the fire chiefs in those jurisdictions. And that equipment was just sitting there in a locked building that was not able to be used."

The director of the Etowah County Rescue Squad, David Kelton, said the rescue squad has not shut down. He said the equipment that was repossessed was not essential to every day operations. Kelton says the organization still possesses enough equipment to function properly. He wishes the county would have waited for the outcome of the state investigation before repossessing the equipment.

"Really, I wasn't prepared for that, through those actions," Kelton said. "But I worked with them. I did make sure at that point they signed for the equipment because I was told through Homeland Security at the state and federal level that that was assigned to us."

The Alabama Law Enforcement Agency is in charge of the death investigation of Vicky Ryan, 46, who died while responding to a call on Big Wills Creek in April. The Etowah County Sheriff's Office is assisting with the investigation. Both agencies say no further details about the investigation will be released at this time.

Loved ones grieve over loss of Etowah County Rescue Squad member

<http://www.wbrc.com/story/28903496/loved-ones-grieve-over-loss-of-etowah-county-rescue-squad-member>

December 22nd 2015 By Megan Hayes, Traffic Anchor

ETOWAH COUNTY, AL (WBRC) - Friends and family are mourning the loss of a loved one in Etowah County.

Vicky Ryan was a member of the Etowah County Rescue Squad. She was killed Saturday while trying to find a missing kayaker on Big Wills Creek. The boat Ryan was riding in capsized and she drowned during the rescue mission.

"She loved the Lord and she had a servant's heart," said Rebekah Vinyard, a friend of Ryan's.

Vinyard said Ryan was one of a kind. She said Ryan never wanted to have the spotlight on herself. She was always focused on helping others. That's why she joined the rescue squad in the first place.



"She wasn't about anything being said about her, she wanted it to be about you or someone else. She wanted to help you, it didn't matter about her really. She just wanted to comfort people and splash Jesus on them," said Vinyard.

"We couldn't believe it," said Mike Hengle, the pastor at Parkway Community Church. "I've been a pastor for thirty-six years and

this one took me totally by surprise I have to say. She was such a sweet sweet person."

Pastor Hengle said Ryan enjoyed singing in the church choir. He joked that she often didn't realize the strength of her talent.

"We had a little thing, everytime she got up to sing, I'd say belt it," he smiled. "She started to go further and further, it was amazing. She had a beautiful voice." Ryan leaves behind her husband and fellow rescue squad member, Houston, and a ten year old son, Brayson.

Her friends and church family say they're prepared to wrap their arms around the family, just like she would have done for them.

"She gave her life for what she wanted to do. The Scripture says what greater gift can you give if you give up your life for another," said Hengle. "She went the way she wanted to go. I really believe that with all my heart."

A GoFundMe page has been set up to help the family during this difficult time: <http://www.gofundme.com/sz2q3e6>

Gadsden councilor pushes for change after 2 drown on part of Big Wills Creek

<http://www.wbrc.com/story/28905344/area-where-etowah-co-rescuer-drowned-dangerous-strong-undertow>

December 22nd 2015 By WBRC Staff

Grief counselors are being made available to the Etowah County Rescue Squad as they mourn the [loss of one of their members](#) who died while trying to find a missing kayaker over the weekend.

Several members of the squad searched for 25-year-old Dakota Brett Crandall, who went missing while kayaking on Big Wills Creek around 10:30 a.m. Saturday. During the search, the spillway water got into the boats and capsized two of them, sending four members to the hospital. Three were released, but Vicky Ryan was pronounced dead at the hospital just before 10:30 p.m. Saturday night.

[Crandall's body was found on Sunday morning.](#) He lived in Southside but was originally from Utah.

On Monday morning, the kayak, rescue boats and life vests were still visible in Big Wills Creek.

Jim Matlock, the assistant fire chief of the Gadsden Fire Department, says the area where it happened on Big Wills Creek off of Brooke Avenue is dangerous and should be off-limits.

"This is not a safe area. It has a very strong undertow and strong current and it's just a dangerous situation. This will be the first fatality we've had but we've had three rescues here in the last month," Matlock said.

"We're looking to put up two signs here at the bridge, one on each side, that says, 'No Boating,'" Gadsden councilor Johnny Cannon said.

He'd also like to see a fence put up around the property, but he's not sure the city can do so. He's looking into it.

As popular as the creek is, Cannon says it is a good place to fish but not to boat or even swim and he hopes people heed the warning.

"Be safe, don't be sorry. Just enjoy your life, but don't get killed down here," Cannon said.

The rescue squad has suspended operations so they can grieve Ryan, who leaves behind her husband Houston, also a member of the rescue squad, and a 10-year-old son Brayson.

Ryan joined the rescue squad after seeing a child drown. She wanted to prevent that from happening to anyone else.

"She gave her life for what she wanted to do," [her pastor Mike Hengle said](#). "The Scripture says what greater gift can you give if you give up your life for another? She went the way she wanted to go. I really believe that with all my heart," he added.

Ryan and the other rescue squad members were all wearing life jackets and were constantly training, but the spillway water got into their boats on Saturday and two of them capsized.

A visitation for Ryan will be held on Thursday, April 30 from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. at Glencoe-Hokes Bluff Funeral Home. Her burial arrangements have not been announced yet.

A GoFundMe page has been set up to help the family during this difficult time: <http://www.gofundme.com/sz2q3e6>

Former rescue squad captain charged with criminally negligent homicide

<http://www.gadsdentimes.com/news/20151222/former-rescue-squad-captain-charged-with-criminally-negligent-homicide>

Dec 22, 2015 By LISA SAVAGETimes Staff Writer



Michael Ervin Bettis

The former captain of the Etowah County Rescue Squad has been arrested for criminally negligent homicide related to the drowning death of a rescue squad volunteer April 25.

Michael Ervin Bettis, 49, Gadsden, was arrested on the misdemeanor charge after he was indicted by an Etowah County grand jury, according to a news release from Sheriff Todd Entrekin.

The news release cited state law that a person commits criminally negligent homicide if he or she causes the death of another person by criminal negligence.

Entrekin said the Alabama Law Enforcement Agency, marine division, was the lead agency during the investigation.

Bettis was held in the Etowah County Detention Center on \$2,500 bond.

Another rescue squad member has been arrested on a felony theft charge after he allegedly was involved in a theft of lights repossessed from the squad after several county agencies stopped using its services following the drowning.

James Charles "Jimmy" Kelton Jr., 62, was charged with first-degree receiving stolen property, a felony, after an incident in September in which a light tower worth \$7,500 was taken from Gadsden City High School, according to Gadsden police reports. The lights were on loan from the city of Gadsden for the Mid-South Marching Festival. When someone went to pick up the lights at the high school, they were gone.

The lights were included in an inventory of equipment repossessed from the rescue squad in June.

The rescue squad had a generator, a flatbed utility trailer, an enclosed utility trailer and thermal imaging device assigned to them by the state's Homeland Security Division. It also had large portable lights operated with a generator and mounted on a trailer owned by the city of Gadsden, which also were repossessed. It is those lights that were reported stolen from the high school three months later.

Kelton was seen with the lights and Gadsden police detectives went to his wrecker business on Forrest Avenue, according to the report. He told detectives he did not have any knowledge about the lights, but it was later determined he had them. The equipment was repossessed from the rescue squad following a series of events triggered by the drowning death April 25 of Vicky Box Ryan, 46.

Ryan drowned after the boat she was in capsized during a mission on Big Wills Creek off Brooke Avenue.

Volunteers with the rescue squad were among those who responded to the low-head dam at the old steel plant pump station for the recovery of the body of a kayaker who went missing in the water about 11 a.m. April 25.

Gadsden Fire Department officials ordered the rescue squad members to stay out of the water and work only from the bank because of unsafe conditions. Neither fire department personnel nor the sheriff's office dive team members went in the water. The water was high, but the conditions at the location of a low-head dam also are dangerous. As water goes over the dam, it creates a strong recirculating current at the dam's base. The force can trap boats against the dam and pull people under the water, even if they are wearing a life vest.

It was determined the rescue mission was to become a body recovery, and Gadsden Fire Chief Stephen Carroll said the rescue squad responded.

"They were told what to do and what not to do," he said in June.

Bettis was captain at the time.

Despite the instructions, the rescue squad put two boats in the water about 5:30 p.m. One of the boats, then the other, got too close to the dam and capsized. Nine rescue squad members were thrown into the water. Ryan drowned and three others were treated at a hospital.

The kayaker's body was recovered the next day.

Following the incident, the ALEA Marine Police division, Etowah County Sheriff's Office, Gadsden Police Department, Gadsden Fire Department and the Etowah County District Attorney's office began an investigation.

That same day, Carroll issued an order that the rescue squad not be permitted to respond or operate within the city of Gadsden.

Another drowning occurred June 14 in the Coosa River, and the following day, a representative from ALEA's Marine Police division gave a directive that the rescue squad was not allowed to respond to incidents on waterways. Entrekin followed that directive.

Similar orders were issued in the following days from the Gadsden/Etowah County Emergency Management Agency and Etowah County Fire Association, as well as organizations and companies that previously had used the rescue squad during events.

Former Etowah County Rescue Squad captain indicted in April 2015 drowning

<http://abc3340.com/news/local/former-rescue-captain-now-behind-bars-facing-negligent-homicide-charge>

BY CANDACE WHITE TUESDAY, DECEMBER 22ND 2015

GADSDEN, Ala. — A former leader of the Etowah County Rescue Squad is charged in the death of a member who was killed during a rescue operation.

The sheriff's office says 49-year-old Michael Ervin Bettis of Gadsden is charged with a misdemeanor count of criminally negligent homicide.

Authorities say Bettis was the squad captain when a member died on April 25 after a boat capsized during a recovery operation.

Officials at the time said **46-year-old Vicky Houston Ryan** was killed after being swept out of a boat that was swamped by water after getting too close to a dam on Big Wells Creek in Gadsden.

Squad members were looking for a kayaker who was presumed drowned. Court records aren't yet available to show whether Bettis has a lawyer to speak on his behalf.

Alabama Code Section 13A-6-4 states:

- (a) *A person commits the crime of criminally negligent homicide if he causes the death of another person by criminal negligence.*
- (b)

Former rescue squad captain indicted in coworker's drowning

http://www.al.com/news/birmingham/index.ssf/2015/12/former_rescue_squad_captain_in.html

December 22, 2015 By Carol Robinson

The former captain of the Etowah County Rescue Squad has been indicted in the death of a squad member who drowned during an April rescue on Big Wills Creek. Michael Ervin Bettis, 49, of Gadsden is charged with one count of criminally negligent homicide, which is a Class A misdemeanor, Etowah County Sheriff Tod Entrekin announced this afternoon. Bettis was booked into the county jail with bond set at \$2,500.

[The incident happened April 25](#) when a 25-year-old man was out kayaking with family members about in Big Wills Creek near Brooke Avenue and was swept into the water. The man went missing near an old low head dam that was once used to pump water into the Gulf States steel mill nearby.



Michael Ervin Bettis / Etowah County Jail

Members of Gadsden Fire and the Etowah County Rescue Squad began a search, and employed two rescue boats. One of the boats got too close to the dam and was swept over the side. The second boat soon followed and nine Rescue Squad workers were cast into the creek.

[Rescue worker Vicky Ryan, 46](#), died later that night at Riverview Regional Medical Center. Three other rescue squad workers were injured. Ryan's husband was also a member of the rescue squad.

The Alabama Bureau of Investigation led the probe into Ryan's death. Authorities haven't specifically said why Bettis was indicted, but said cited this Alabama law: Alabama Code Section 13A-6-4 states: (a) A person commits the crime of

criminally negligent homicide if he causes the death of another person by criminal negligence.

About two months after Ryan's death, deputies with the Etowah County Sheriff's Office and the county's Emergency Management Agency [seized equipment from the Etowah County Rescue Squad](#), driving off from the squad's headquarters with spotlights, thermal imaging equipment and two trailers. Three m

Former AL rescue squad captain criminally charged after member killed during river rescue operation

<http://www.statter911.com/2015/12/23/former-al-rescue-squad-captain-criminally-charged-after-member-killed-during-river-rescue-operation/>

Dec 23, 2015

Michael Bettis, the former Etowah County (AL) Rescue Squad, has been indicted on a charge of criminally negligent homicide in the death of member Vicky Ryan. Ryan died during a water rescue operation on April 25. The rescue boat carrying Ryan went over a dam followed by a second rescue boat.

At the time of the incident, Bettis was being interviewed by a TV reporter. That interview was interrupted by a loud scream.

[Lisa Savage, GadsdenTimes.com:](#)

Gadsden Fire Department officials ordered the rescue squad members to stay out of the water and work only from the bank because of unsafe conditions. Neither fire department personnel nor the sheriff's office dive team members went in the water.

The water was high, but the conditions at the location of a low-head dam also are dangerous.

It was determined the rescue mission was to become a body recovery, and Gadsden Fire Chief Stephen Carroll said the rescue squad responded.

"They were told what to do and what not do," he said in June.

Despite the instructions, the rescue squad put two boats in the water about 5:30 p.m. One of the boats, then the other, got too close to the dam and capsized.

[Carol Robinson, AL.com:](#)

The Alabama Bureau of Investigation led the probe into Ryan's death. Authorities haven't specifically said why Bettis was indicted, but said cited this Alabama law: Alabama Code Section 13A-6-4 states: (a) A person commits the crime of criminally negligent homicide if he causes the death of another person by criminal negligence.



PREVIOUSLY:

Video: Alabama rescue squad member killed after rescue boats flip at dam during river search

Equipment seized at Alabama rescue squad that suffered line-of-duty-death

*About two months after Ryan's death, deputies with the Etowah County Sheriff's Office and the county's Emergency Management Agency **seized equipment from the Etowah County Rescue Squad**, driving off from the squad's headquarters with spotlights, thermal imaging equipment and two trailers. Three members of the agency also had to turn in their deputies' badges.*



Vicky Ryan



Vicky Ryan with her husband and son. Source: GoFundMe website



The Etowah County Rescue Squad searched for a missing kayaker on Big Wills Creek on Saturday. Source: Dixon Hayes/WBRC



**A kayak, rescue boats and life vests are still visible in Big Wills Creek after a rescuer drowned trying to find a missing kayaker on Saturday.
Source: Clare Huddleston/WBRC**