Newport Beach Lifeguard Drowns While Rescuing Man In Rough Waters

http://losangeles.cbslocal.com/2014/07/06/hunt-is-on-for-lifeguard-who-went-missing-in-newport-beach/

July 6, 2014 10:00 PM

EWPORT BEACH (CBSLA.com) — A Newport Beach lifeguard drowned Sunday rescuing a man who got caught up in rough surf. The lifeguard was identified as 32-year-old Ben Carlson, a 15-year veteran of the department.

Carlson entered the water about 5 p.m., near 16th Street, to

https://www.facebook.com/ktla5/photos/a.440942949613.222741.72391084613/10152542741789614/?type=1&theater

July 7, 2014   **KTLA 5 News**

rescue a man who got overtaken by rough water about 6-8 feet deep. While making the rescue, Carlson was also overtaken by the rough rip tide. After being hit by a huge wave, Carlson went down and was not seen again until about 8 p.m.

Carlson was pulled from the water near the Newport Beach Pier at 72 McFadden Place.

Newport Beach Fire Chief Scott Poster made the sad announcement at a news briefing Sunday evening.

"Today, it's with deep sorrow," Poster said, "that the Newport Beach Fire Department announces the on-duty death of one of our own."

The Sunday tragedy was the first time in the department's 100 year history that a lifeguard died in the line of duty.

Rescue crews made a desperate and heroic effort, including a foot-by-foot search between jetties and a chain of human divers, to save the life of their colleague. More than 25 people took part in the search, Poster said.

The man Carlson helped rescue is fine, authorities said.

Carlson was taken to Hoag Hospital in Newport Beach after paramedics desperately worked at resuscitating him.

He was declared dead at the hospital, authorities said.

KCAL9's Cristy Fajardo said family members and fellow lifeguards were

**Ben Carlson drowned Sunday making a rescue at Newport Beach.
(credit: Facebook)**

visibly shaken and distraught with many of them overcome with emotion.
As the ambulance carrying his body left the pier, there was a deep show of respect by colleagues who saluted in admiration and grief.

Poster called Carlson "one of the good guys who was always smiling."
Fajardo said Carlson was very popular among beachgoers — he often warned them about treacherous surf.

Poster said hundreds of people were rescued over the weekend.

Lifeguard drowns in Newport Beach
http://www.latimes.com/local/orangecounty/la-me-lifeguard-20140707-story.html
July 7, 2014 by Catherine Sailant

**Lifeguards search for Ben Carlson, a 15-year veteran lifeguard, at Newport Beach on Sunday.
(Nicole / @LadyNC)**

A Newport Beach lifeguard drowned Sunday during a rescue attempt near the city's pier. Officials said it was the first time a city lifeguard had died in the line of duty.

Ben Carlson, a 15-year veteran Newport Beach lifeguard, was pulled from the ocean by colleagues, somber fire officials announced during an evening news conference.

They had been frantically searching for him after he disappeared under 10-foot waves while trying to rescue a swimmer in distress, authorities said. As Carlson, 32, reached the swimmer, they were hit by the waves; the swimmer made it back to shore, but the lifeguard disappeared.

The loss shocked the close-knit public safety department in Newport Beach.
"It's been a very difficult time,'' said Police Sgt. Penny Freeman.

Lifeguard Who Drowned During Rescue Attempt in Newport Beach Remembered as 'Hero'

HTTP://KTLA.COM/2014/07/07/HE-IS-DEFINITELY-A-HERO-FIRE-CHIEF-SAYS-OF-LIFEGUARD-WHO-DROWNED-IN-NEWPORT-BEACH/
JULY 7, 2014, BY ASHLEY SOLEY-CERRO, CHIP YOST, MELISSA PAMER AND STEVE KUZJ, *UPDATED AT 12:24AM, JULY 8, 2014*

A 32-year-old Newport Beach lifeguard who was the first in the city's history to die in the line of duty was being praised Monday as a hero who loved his job.
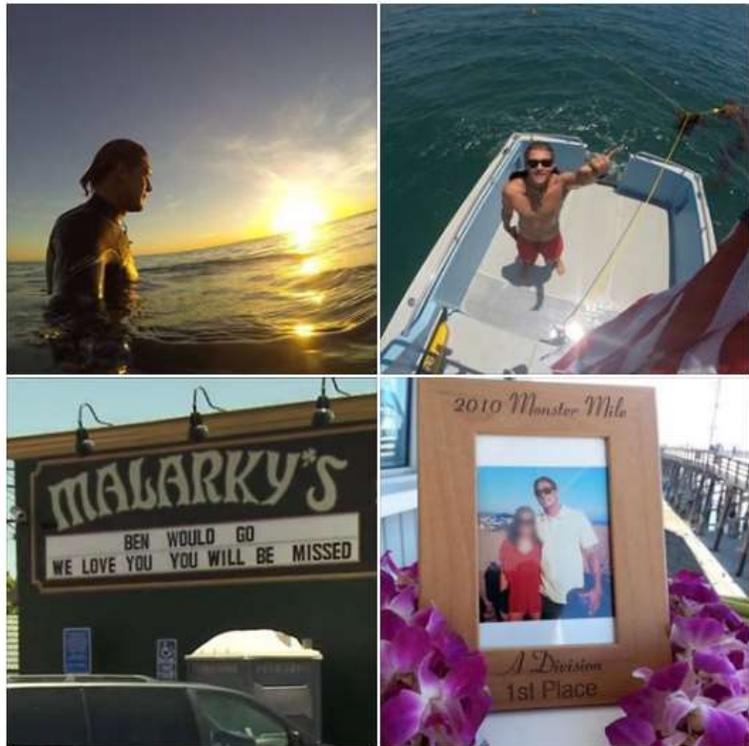
Ben Carlson died Sunday night after diving off a rescue boat to assist a distressed swimmer when 10 to 12 foot waves overtook both men.

The turbulent water prevented other lifeguards from helping Carlson, but they were able to pull the unidentified swimmer from the ocean, a news release from Newport Beach stated Monday.

Twenty-five people from multiple agencies searched for Carlson in the water, and they were supported by some 30 more on shore and a police helicopter, according to the city. Carlson was found about 8 p.m.

He was rushed to Hoag Hospital, where he was pronounced dead. The rescued swimmer fully recovered.

"He is definitely a hero. The victim he was rescuing survived, and he gave the ultimate sacrifice," Newport Beach Fire Department Assistant Chief Rob Williams said.

Carlson was originally from the Inland Empire and attended the University of California, Irvine. In addition to serving as a lifeguard, Carlson was a bar manager at a Wahoo's Fish Taco location at Fashion Island mall, where the chain's founder said his love of life would be missed.

Carlson had worked at the Newport Beach Fire Department since he was 17 years old and was described as a strong surfer and swimmer.

"It's a very tough loss to lose one of our lifeguards. Especially a gentleman like Ben who's been with us for so long, who's been a staple in our units and helping younger guards," Williams said.

Carlson's death came at the end of the long Fourth of July weekend, when forecasters had warned about dangerous rip currents and elevated surf at Southern California beaches.

If there's a rescue he would be the first one out ... big surf, big wave ... he didn't hold back," lifeguard Jose Delajara said.

At Malarky's pub in Newport Beach, where Carlson had also worked, the restaurant's marquee on Monday read: "Ben would go," a reference to a Hawaiian lifeguard legend and surfer who braved massive waves to rescue others. "We love you. You will be missed."

"People loved being around him. He was the life of the party. You walk in, you see him, he's got a smile," said bar owner Mario Marovic. "He's just a happy guy."

Carlson loved his beach lifestyle and being around the water, Marovic said.

"He loved being a lifeguard. That was his lifelong goal … to be a lifeguard," Marovic said.

Wahoo's founder Wing Lam concurred with Marovic's description of Carlson, saying he was "happy-go-lucky, always positive, full of energy."

A photo posted on Carlson's private Instagram account, which was confirmed by Lam, showed him on duty aboard a boat on July 4, with the caption "Keeping them safe on the 4th."

Flowers and pictures of Carlson were placed at the lifeguard station near the pier on Monday.

"He died doing what he loved ... saving lives," Delajara said. "We are shocked we lost ... one of the best."

Funeral arrangements had not yet been made, but Carlson was expected to get a line-of-duty public memorial.

KTLA's Kennedy Ryan contributed to this story.

Drowning death of lifeguard shakes Newport Beach

http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-lifeguards-drowning-death-20140707-story.html

July 7, 2014 by **Jill Cowan and Emily Foxhall**

The flag at the Newport Pier flew at half staff, flowers stuffed in swim fins were lined up outside the lifeguard headquarters and a note pasted to the entrance of a beach-area restaurant read "Closed today – Ben Carlson, bro lifeguard drowned on a rescue."

Summertime mood in Newport Beach turns somber after drowning death of lifeguard

The summertime mood in the heart of Newport Beach turned somber Monday the day after Carlson drowned while trying to rescue a swimmer caught up in 10-foot surf. He was the first lifeguard to have drowned on duty in the beach city in 100 years.

Like others in the tightknit beachfront community around the bustling pier, Rick and Patty Galippo visited lifeguard headquarters. They left a bouquet of yellow flowers. They didn't know Carlson but said they'd watched the attempt to rescue him the day before.

"We just felt the somber mood," Patty Galippo said.

Newport Beach resident Carly Christian, 18, brought a framed photo of herself posing with Carlson after she won the Monster Mile junior lifeguard competition in 2010. She said Carlson had once been her instructor, as well as her water polo coach at Newport Harbor High School.

"Ben was just the type of guy that would push you to your limits because he knew you could succeed. He'd never let you give up at all."

Dave Kiff, the city manager of Newport Beach, said he arrived on the shoreline Sunday about 45 minutes after the search was launched. Carlson had disappeared under the choppy waves while trying to rescue a swimmer at about 5 p.m.

Kiff said the search, though "heartbreaking," was a "really remarkable thing to watch."

A line of lifeguards swam in a line perpendicular to the shore. About every 20 seconds, Kiff said, they'd "pop their heads up" and their leader would shout "Dive!"

> *"Ben was just the type of guy that would push you to your limits because he knew you could succeed. He'd never let you give up at all." — Carly Christian, Newport Beach resident*

"All you'd see were fins — their fins would pop up and down they'd go," he said.

"And it's just heartbreaking because by that point, you know the outcome is not good."

Kiff estimated that more than 30 lifeguards aided in the search as a pair of helicopters hovered above the water, one on loan from neighboring Huntington Beach.

At about sundown, Kiff said, Carlson's body was found near the pier.

During the search, Kiff said, the beach and pier were crowded, many visitors continuing to enjoy the weather and beach scene as the search unfolded.

But Newport residents who often walk their dogs or stroll the beach sensed something was wrong, he said.

He said the outpouring of support from the community has been heartening. Early Monday, he said, city employees discovered that someone had left flowers on all of city's lifeguard vehicles.

In messages and flowers, Newport Beach mourns drowned lifeguard

http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-in-newport-beach-mourns-lifeguard-20140711-story.html
July 11, 2014 by **Emily Foxhall**

Almost overnight, the messages on marquees, the bouquets of flowers and the condolences scratched out on chalkboards began to appear along the waterfront in Newport Beach in shared grief for a lifeguard who drowned trying to save a swimmer.

"Aloha Ben Carlson," read one at Rudy's Pub and Grill on the Balboa Peninsula. "Always Ohana," or always family.

"Love & Support 2 Bens Fam and N.B. Lifeguards," said another at Cruisers Pizza Bar Grill farther down the peninsula.

At the core of the community's outpouring of sympathy for Ben Carlson is its relationship with the ocean. The waves have drawn many but the waves are also what claimed Carlson's life last Sunday. He was the first lifeguard to have drowned on duty in 100 years.

"The water maybe unites us all, the love of the water," said Helen Shull, who owns Even Sisters on Balboa Island, where passersby have left notes in a box outside to be given to Carlson's family. "It's heartbreaking."

"Hero to the End," Avila's El Ranchito declared on its marquee. "Our Hometown Hero."

"We love you," spelled the letters at Malarky's Irish Pub, where Carlson once worked. "You will be missed."

Inside the bar, Carlson's red Newport Beach lifeguard jacket hangs, suspended from the ceiling above where several lifeguards tend bar and where many others have gathered to share memories since his death. They have also helped to raise money toward a scholarship fund.

Newport Beach mourns lifeguard who drowned saving a swimmer. (Emily Foxhall / Daily Pilot)

"He's a local hero," said Katie Munson, a Malarky's employee.

Carlson was honored publicly Wednesday morning in a "swim-out," when a plaque was hung from the swim ladder at Newport Pier, near where his body was found after a several-hour search. Later that night, he was posthumously given an Excellence in Lifesaving award, recognized by Hoag Hospital.

Flags at all county buildings will be at half-staff through Sunday, when a paddle-out will be held in the morning and a beachside memorial service at night.

Although he didn't know Carlson, the guard was still "one of our own," said Ryan Lynch, an assistant manager at Mutt Lynch's, where a sign, like a headstone, reads "RIP" followed by Carlson's name and the date of his death, July 6, 2014.

"We wanted to pay respects to the community," added Mike Vayner, a manager at the bar, where lifeguards and firemen have stopped in for sandwiches for decades. Notes, too, are tucked among bouquets of flowers piled at the Newport Beach lifeguard headquarters: "May you always find blue skies and fair seas during your Endless Summer," wrote the Carroll family.

A letter to the lifeguards from "Your Port Streets Neighbors," mounted on red paper, ends with the sentiment: "Thank you for all that you do and for all that you are."

On a flipper, the phrase "Rest in Paradise" is scrawled.

Statue planned to remember drowned Newport Beach lifeguard Ben Carlson

http://www.ocregister.com/articles/carlson-635992-statue-lifeguard.html
Sept. 25, 2014 BY **NICOLE SHINE / STAFF WRITER**

NEWPORT BEACH – Framed photos and memorial bouquets have been cleared away outside lifeguard headquarters at the Newport Pier.

A drive down Balboa Boulevard shows restaurant marquees promoting $2 drinks, rather than telling a grieving town that they too mourn Ben Carlson, the lifeguard who lost his life July 6 during a rescue.

But Carlson isn't forgotten.

An artist's rendering shows the Ben Carlson memorial statue planned for next to the Balboa Pier. Carlson lost his life July 6 during a rescue.COURTESY OF NEWPORT BEACH PUBLIC LIBRARY

A statue in his likeness may rise next summer at the Balboa Pier, just a mile or so from where 32-year-old Carlson drowned in deadly surf. The statue would serve as a tangible tribute to Carlson, the first lifeguard killed in the line of duty in Newport's near-100-year history. More than that, it might help this town prevent another ocean tragedy. It might even help the Carlson family heal.

• • •

On the day Carlson died, a red flag warned beachgoers of rough conditions near Tower 15. Carlson jumped from the lifeguard boat to save a swimmer in distress. The swimmer survived, but Carlson disappeared into the roiling surf. His body was recovered later that night near the 28th Street jetty.

In the days and weeks after, family, friends and well-wishers mourned. Thousands took part in a paddle-out tribute. The saying, "Ben Would Go" and "Ben Did Go," appeared on T-shirts, signs and social media, a real and virtual symbol of remembrance. The phrase originated with Hawaiian surfer and lifeguard Eddie Aikau, who died in 1978 after trying to swim to shore to rescue his crew when a

boat they were on capsized in stormy waters.

Since that time, the Carlson family has started the Ben Carlson Memorial and Scholarship Foundation and carved out a mission. They plan to promote water safety, offer scholarships to student lifeguards and support organizations that aid underprivileged youths.

A bar in Seal Beach hosted a foundation fundraiser just last week and more are planned.

Chris Carlson said he turns to his faith to get him through the tragedy. But making good come out of the loss of his son also helps.

"There's some healing in it, because we can see something good come out of something really bad," he said.

• • •

The statue is part of it. The concept for the 9-foot bronze memorial was designed by Ben Carlson's brother-in-law. It depicts Carlson in lifeguard trunks. He holds a rescue tube in one hand, and his other hand shades his eyes, as if in perpetual watch over the coastline.

The statue is expected to include an interactive, educational component about ocean safety. It's designed to educate beachgoers and foster an appreciation of the perils lifeguards face every workday, Chris Carlson said.

After Ben's death, Chris Carlson said lifeguards came to this discomforting realization: If it could happen to Ben, it could happen to me.

"It shook them up a little bit," Carlson said. "We want to stop another family from going through this."

There's no precedent in the city for approving a statue like this. Josh Yocum, a former lifeguard and foundation board member, said city Arts Commissioners were encouraging after they were presented with the concept at a Sept. 11 meeting. He said the foundation has already approached some members of the city Parks, Beaches & Recreation Commission about the plans.

Yocum said they've spoken with three artists and are getting cost estimates. They plan to pay for the statue with private donations.

Beyond that, he said they have few details, except for one. They hope to unveil the statue July 2, 2015. That day would have been Ben Carlson's 33rd birthday.

Staff writer Laylan Connelly contributed to this report.

Cause of drowned Newport Beach lifeguard death released

http://www.ocregister.com/articles/carlson-637231-died-lifeguard.html

Oct. 3, 2014 **BY LAYLAN CONNELLY / STAFF WRITER**

Ben Carlson, 32, a Newport Beach lifeguard, drowned while trying to rescue a swimmer off the Newport Beach coast on July 6. Carlson was pulled from the water by fellow lifeguards following a frantic, three-hour search. The 15-year department veteran went into the water to help a swimmer struggling in the water when they were hit by a large wave.
COURTESY OF NEWPORT BEACH POLICE DEPARTMENT

Ben Carlson, a Newport Beach lifeguard who died while trying to make a rescue in big surf, died from accidental drowning, according to a spokesperson at the Orange County Coroner Division.

The official cause of death took months to complete for the 32-year-old guard and puts to rest questions of whether he suffered a fatal head injury by hitting the ocean floor or died from natural causes like a heart attack during the rescue. He was the first to die in the line of duty in nearly 100 years of Newport Beach's lifeguarding services.

Carlson died on July 6 during a red flag warning of rough conditions.

Carlson jumped from the lifeguard boat to save a swimmer in distress near tower 15. The swimmer survived, but Carlson disappeared into the raging surf. His body was recovered later that night near the 28th Street jetty.

Carlson and his family continue to be honored for his heroics. Thousands showed up for a paddle-out memorial in July, and a scholarship fund has been set up in his name. A statue is planned for Carlson in Newport Beach near Balboa Pier, just about a mile from where he died.

On Thursday, the California Surf Lifesaving Association will give his family a posthumous Medal of Valor award on Carlson's behalf at a meeting in San Clemente.

Newport Beach lifeguard headquarters renamed in honor of fallen rescuer

http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-newport-lifeguard-headquarters-20150309-story.html

March 9, 2015 by **Hannah Fry**

The headquarters for Newport Beach's lifeguards have been renamed in honor of a 32-year-old lifeguard who drowned last summer trying to save a swimmer, the only city lifeguard in 100 years to die in the line of duty.

The headquarters, at the foot of the Newport Pier, were dedicated in Ben Carlson's name Sunday during an emotional ceremony in which his family and fellow lifeguards pledged that the building would stand in remembrance of his sacrifice and as a reminder that the ocean commands respect and caution.

The family of Ben Carlson is joined by Newport Beach city leaders during the renaming of the city's lifeguard headquarters. (Susan Hoffman / Daily Pilot)

"When people look at the name on this building, our hope is that they remember our son," said Carlson's father, Chris. "We also hope they think about the young people in towers, trucks and boats who are working hard to make Newport Beach into this amazing community — fun and, most of all, safe."

A rendering of the soon-to-be-installed plaque at Newport Beach's renamed lifeguard headquarters provides information about lifeguard Ben Carlson. (Susan Hoffman / Daily Pilot)

Carlson was aboard a rescue boat July 6 when he received a call that a swimmer was stuck in larger-than-normal 6- to 8-foot surf. The lifeguard jumped off the boat and swam toward the man.

But a large wave slammed them underwater. The swimmer made it safely to shore, but Carlson did not. After a three-hour search, his body was found near the pier.

His death resonated in a city with such deep ties to its beaches and waterfront.

"It was amazing the way they drew close to us and really adopted us as one of their own," Chris Carlson said. "I don't know how he would react to all of this. He wasn't into the accolades."

When Carlson made the decision to dive off the rescue boat, he was doing what he loved, his father said.

"Ben exemplified the qualities we want to instill in all of our lifeguards," said Newport's chief lifeguard, Rob Williams. "He was highly skilled and dedicated to his profession, always prepared to do his job, and he never hesitated to help wherever and whenever needed. He loved his job and it showed."

Just before the dedication ceremony for the Benjamin M. Carlson Lifeguard Headquarters, 86 hopefuls swarmed the beach to try out for a spot on the Newport Beach lifeguard roster.

They competed in various endurance tests, each hoping to be one of the final 30 candidates.

It was the same test Ben Carlson completed 15 years ago.

Efforts continue to place a bronze memorial statue modeled after Carlson at the Newport Pier or Balboa Pier, said Jake Janz, Carlson's brother-in-law.

The Ben Carlson Memorial Foundation is accepting donations online, and this month Costa Mesa-based surfwear brand Hurley hosted an art auction that raised about $15,000 for the cause. The statue is expected to cost $125,000.