

***Police Officer***

**Craig E. Lehner**

Buffalo Police Department, New York

### **End of Watch: Friday, October 13, 2017**

Police Officer Craig Lehner drowned while conducting a training dive in the Niagara River, in the area of Broderick Park and Bird Island Pier.

Members of the agency's Underwater Recovery Team were conducting a regularly scheduled training exercise in swift water currents. Officer Lehner entered the water as part of the training but failed to surface after his safety cable broke while he was submerged.

Officer Lehner's body was recovered on October 17th, 2017, during a massive recovery effort involving over 20 local, state, federal, and Canadian law enforcement agencies.

Officer Lehner was a veteran of the Army National Guard. He had served with the Buffalo Police Department for nine years and was assigned to the Canine Unit. He is survived by his mother and sister.

Please contact the following agency to send condolences or to obtain funeral arrangements:

Commissioner Daniel Derenda  
Buffalo Police Department  
74 Franklin Street  
Buffalo, NY 14202  
Phone: (716) 851-4444

## Missing Buffalo Police diver identified as Craig Lehner

<http://www.wkbw.com/news/sources-missing-buffalo-police-diver>

Oct 13, 2017 [WKBW Staff](#) Updated Oct 14, 2017

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) Buffalo Police have identified the missing police diver as Craig Lehner, 34, of Buffalo.

Lehner graduated from the police academy in 2008. He has been working with the K-9 unit, partnering with police dogs. He has been with the underwater search and rescue team for about a year.

Buffalo Police said the search for a missing police diver is "still a rescue," as night falls on the city.

According to investigators, the 34-year-old diver – who's been with the department for 8 years -- was participating in a routine training exercise when he vanished around 12:50 p.m.

Crews from multiple agencies have concentrated the search at the foot of Ferry Street in Buffalo.

Coast Guard crews said as part of their search efforts, they discovered the cable keeping the diver secured against the current had broken. They initially thought they discovered the diver's secondary dive tanks on the water's surface, but police said what was found was actually a spare tank that came off an unrelated boat.

The Coast Guard is now on-site, along with Grand Island Fire and Buffalo Police. Other agencies were called in to assist, including a crew from Coast Guard Air Station Detroit, aboard an MH-65 Dolphin helicopter.

Buffalo Mayor Byron Brown visited crews at Unity Park as they searched Friday. Some local elected officials have weighed in on the search efforts on Twitter.

## Missing Buffalo Police Diver: Coast Guard Suspends Search For Craig Lehner

<http://www.democratandchronicle.com/story/news/2017/10/13/missing-buffalo-police-diver-crews-craig-lehner-search/764129001/>

Oct. 13, 2017 | Updated 8:50 p.m. ET Oct. 14, 2017 WGRZ

The Buffalo Police Department is still searching for the missing Recovery Team member who went missing in the Niagara River, but the Great Lakes, Coast Guard district suspended its search Friday night.



The missing diver is Craig Lehner, 34, who joined the force in 2008. He has been with Underwater Recovery Team for about a year.

According to a statement from the Coast Guard, "Following suspension, Coast Guard assets from Station Buffalo and Air Station Detroit remained on scene to assist with recovery efforts, led by the Buffalo Police Department, until they were relieved by local assets."

The Rochester Police Department's scuba unit has also assisted in the search.

A tweet from the Buffalo Police Department Friday said, "Due to unsafe conditions BPD announce that water rescue search, including robotic search will resume Saturday morning."

Police are concentrating on an area between the foot of Ferry and foot of Ontario streets.

Buffalo Police say their 14-member Underwater Recovery Team was participating in a routine training session just before 1 p.m. when Lehner went missing.

"These are very dangerous waters to do diving in. At least once a month we train in these waters," Rinaldo said. "Unfortunately, sometimes training can be very dangerous," Buffalo Police Lt. Jeff Rinaldo said. "The water moves anywhere from 12 to 15 knots and under the water there's a number of serious, serious obstacles — debris, down trees, shopping carts, rocks, cars."

The Coast Guard was notified just after 1 p.m. It says that a tender cable, which connects the diver to the boat, had "parted." Originally the Coast Guard said that the diver's secondary dive tanks were also recovered on the water's surface, however Buffalo Police say those tanks belonged to a boat and not the diver.

Several agencies are assisting Buffalo Police including local, county and state police and fire departments, the U.S. Coast Guard and Canadian authorities.

"We're a family. As you saw, every uniform from here to Rochester was down here offering assistance. We pull together. We have a job to do right now, that's to help find our brother," Rinaldo said.



**Buffalo Police dive team is searching for a missing person in the Niagara River.**  
*(Photo: WGRZ)*

A robotic search will continue overnight, while divers will searching around 7 a.m. Saturday.

## Search For Missing Diver Suspended And Could Continue Sunday

<http://buffalonews.com/2017/10/13/search-resumes-craig-lehner-missing-bpd-diver-k-9-officer/>  
October 13, 2017 By [T.J. Pignataro](#) and [Lou Michel](#) Updated October 14, 2017



**Buffalo Police dive team is searching for a missing person in the Niagara River.**  
(Photo: WGRZ)

The effort to locate missing Buffalo Police diver Craig E. Lehner in the Niagara River off Broderick Park has been suspended and will continue tomorrow weather permitting, Buffalo Police said.

Authorities said they believe they know the area of the river that diver Craig Lehner is located in.

"We're pretty confident of the area where he might have been snagged or caught up in," said Buffalo Police Lt. Jeff Rinaldo.

When asked at the evening press conference how long the search might last, Rinaldo said, "The search will continue until we find our officer."

Divers, in pairs of two, are conducting search patterns on the river bottom. Search teams are using "robotic vehicles with cameras" to try and find the missing officer. The Air One helicopter from the sheriff's office is up in the air.

Rinaldo said the divers found a river full of full grown trees and boulders the size of cars, not to mention the fast Niagara currents.

Cadaver search dogs brought in from the state Federation of Rescue Teams are also being used on the shore and on boats in the hope that they can provide clues and narrow the area where the officer went missing.

"At this point, it is a search-and-rescue mission," Rinaldo said at a briefing for the media Saturday morning at Broderick Park.

In addition to the agencies on the scene now, a piece of "extremely sophisticated sonar technology" that normally is used by the U.S. Navy is being flown to Buffalo



from the New York Police Department by a State Police Aviation Unit to assist in the search, Rinaldo said.

Rinaldo said the all-hands-on-deck effort is designed to "narrow down an area to search for our officer."

He said that search remains concentrated in an area from the start of the breakwall to the International Bridge.

Rinaldo said the all-hands-on-deck effort is designed to "narrow down an area to search for our officer."

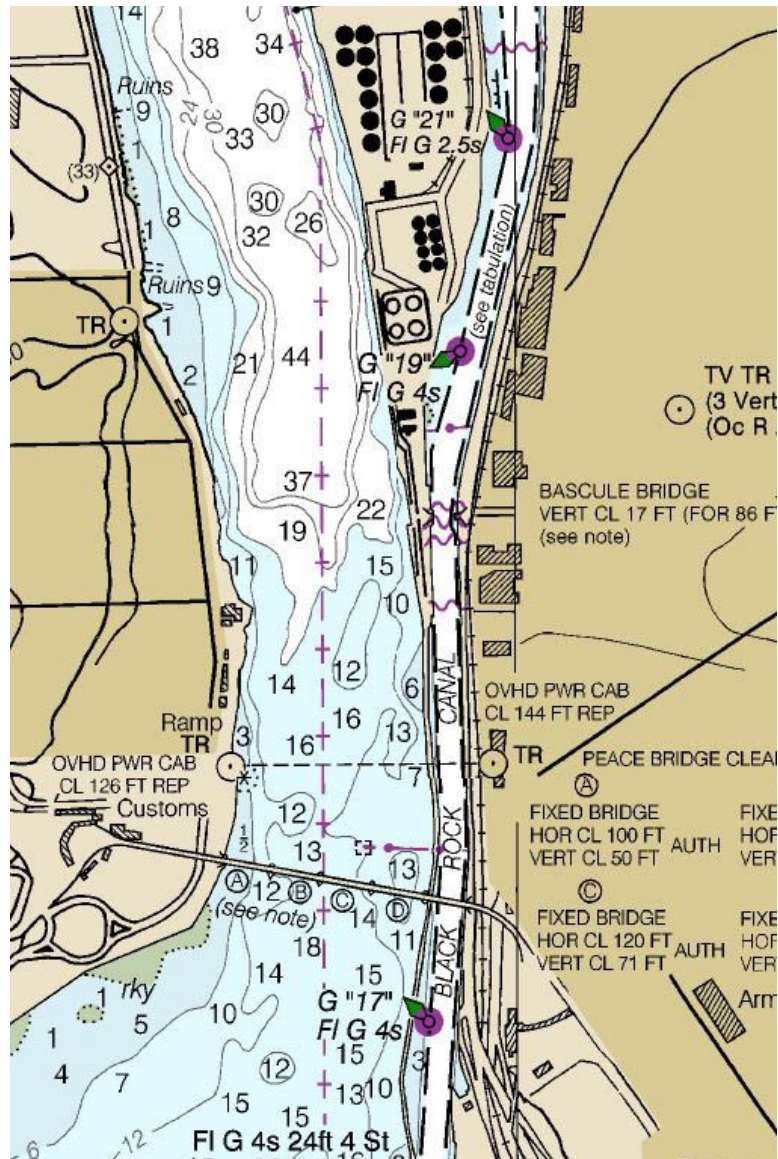
He said that search remains concentrated in an area from the start of the breakwall to the International Bridge.

Lehner went into the Niagara River at the foot of West Ferry Street during a training exercise Friday but did not come out. The search for Lehner, a 34-year-old police diver and full-time K-9 Unit officer, started at about 12:50 p.m. Friday and stretched until 9 p.m., with portable flood lights on the shore. Four rescue boats equipped with sonar conducted a grid search in the swift waters off Broderick Park, and underwater robots scoured the river's bottom.

Then, Saturday morning, the search continued shortly after daybreak.

Buffalo Mayor Byron W. Brown and District

Attorney John Flynn joined Rinaldo at Broderick Park to address the media Saturday morning.



**A section of a nautical chart of the Niagara River shows the varying depths of the water in the area the Underwater Recovery Team was practicing in. (NOAA Office of Coast Survey)**

"Our hearts are certainly hurting this morning," Brown said, "but we continue to be prayerful as the search continues."

**[Buffalo's Underwater Recovery Team: What does it do?]**

Flynn said the agencies from outside of Buffalo – including federal, state, county and local first responders, and even some from Canada – who are helping in the search effort are a testament to the support the Buffalo Police Department has. "These are dedicated men and women who want to help," Flynn said.

"We didn't have to make one call for assistance," Rinaldo added of the search. "It's heartwarming and makes us proud to be law enforcement."

Rinaldo said the search includes an unprecedented number of law enforcement agencies, twenty in all, including divers from New York City.

Flynn said he spoke to Lehner's sister who said that the massive search effort reflects "Buffalo at its best."

Rochester sent a team to help in the search. According to Rinaldo, the team members have experience training in the murky waters of the Genesee River. Before the identity of the officer was released Friday night, several police sources provided The Buffalo News with his name, explaining that his family members had been notified and some were at the scene, keeping vigil.

Lehner's fellow divers repeatedly searched the 25-foot deep water off Bird Island Pier, but they were called to shore at dusk to avoid the possibility of more tragedy.

"Unfortunately, this is a very, very dangerous section to dive in," said Rinaldo, who would not speculate on what might have gone wrong Friday morning. "The water moves anywhere from 12 to 15 knots, and under the water here there was a number of serious ... obstacles, debris, downed trees, rocks, shopping carts, cars, over the years things found themselves in the water right there.

"This is the fastest fresh water, I believe in the country and Canada as well" Rinaldo told reporters. "It is extremely dangerous, and that's why our team trains for these situations."

Rinaldo said divers don upward of "40 to 80 pounds" of additional equipment when they dive. That just adds to the challenge.

Other police explained that the team trains there because practicing in the swift currents enables them to be prepared for hazardous missions.

Visibility beneath the water, Rinaldo said, was "somewhat decent," about 10 feet, at the time the team was training.

First responders from about 15 agencies, including from Canada, were taking part in the search.

Even Shield, Lehner's 4-year-old German shepherd K-9 Unit partner, was at the scene for a short time.

Lehner named the dog Shield last year in honor of Buffalo Police Officer James A. Shields, 36, who was killed in the line of duty in October 2002 when his patrol vehicle crashed into a tree on Delaware Avenue while he was responding to a robbery call.



**Town of Hamburg Rescue 1 was back on the water early Saturday, looking for missing police diver Craig E. Lehner. (Sharon Cantillon/Buffalo News)**

Lehner, who is not married, joined the police department in 2008 and served in the Army National Guard with deployments to Iraq and the U.S. military base at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba.

Fellow officers said Lehner is well-liked — and devoted to his job.



**Search and rescue crews scour the Niagara River near Broderick Park at the foot of West Ferry Street where a Buffalo Police diver went missing during training exercises Friday. (Derek Gee/Buffalo News)**

Asked how local police were coping with this tragedy happening to one of their own, Rinaldo said: "We're a family. As you saw, every uniform, from here to Rochester, was offering assistance. We've pulled together. We have a job to do right now. ... There will be time for emotions after we get our job done."

The 14-member Underwater Recovery Team, Rinaldo said, conducts monthly practices in the waters off the foot of West Ferry, and Friday was one of those practices.

The U.S. Coast Guard, which provided a 45-foot response boat to the search effort, said crews discovered the diver's tender cable had parted, according to a news



release from the Coast Guard's Great Lakes district. A Coast Guard helicopter from Detroit also aided in the search along with the Air One helicopter from the Erie County Sheriff's Office and another from the U.S. Border Patrol.

The Coast Guard also reported a diver's secondary dive tanks were discovered on the surface of the river, but Rinaldo told reporters the tanks were not connected to the missing Buffalo police diver.

At about 4:15 p.m., police sources told The News teams searching the waters off the Bird Island pier found a glove of the type worn by members of the dive team. A Buffalo police photographer took pictures of it before it was taken from the water.

City of Tonawanda Police Capt. Fredric Foels, whose department provided one of the sonar search boats, said the waters off the park move at 10 to 12 mph.

"They are doing the best they can out there, but along the shore I'm sure there are a lot of heavy hearts," said Foels, as he watched the search efforts from the park. "It's in God's hands," said Buffalo Police Chaplain Bilal Abdullah. "We hope for something positive."

The Buffalo Fire Department deployed crews to various spots downstream along the Niagara River to keep a lookout for a body in the water, according to department radio traffic.

The Grand Island Fire Department was also deployed to maintain a lookout at River Oaks Marina. And one of that department's boats was providing sonar assistance off Broderick Park.

"I would estimate there are a dozen to 15 agencies assisting us all the way up to Grand Island and on the other side of the border," said Michael J. DeGeorge, spokesman for the Buffalo Police Department and Mayor Byron W. Brown, who visited the scene.

Divers from departments around the area, including the City of Tonawanda and Hamburg, also assisted in the search.

Before the day turned tragic, Steven Chamberlain said he and a companion had arrived at the park in the late morning.

"We showed up here around 11 a.m. when the divers were just going into the water," Chamberlain said. "We were here to go fishing, and we moved along because we didn't want to get in the way of the dive team."

Chamberlain and his fellow angler returned after noticing a number of emergency vehicles in the area.

"When we came back, we just learned one of the divers was missing," Chamberlain said. "I asked a Border Patrol officer what happened. He told me one of the diver's rope broke."  
**Harold McNeil contributed to this report.**

## Sean Kirst: A Police Dog Runs To The River, In Fierce Loyalty To Missing Officer

<http://buffalonews.com/2017/10/14/sean-kirst-police-dog-runs-river-fierce-loyalty-missing-officer/>  
By [Sean Kirst](#) | Published October 14, 2017 | Updated October 17, 2017

Officer Craig Lehner brought his dog Shield with him Friday, when he drove to the Niagara River for training with other police divers. That was standard and vigilant behavior, said Lt. Salvatore Losi, commanding officer of the department's K-9 unit.

Dog and master were all but inseparable, and Lehner wanted Shield to be nearby if they were called to some emergency.



**Buffalo Police K-9 officer Craig Lehner with his dog Shield.**  
(Image courtesy Lt. Salvatore Losi)

So Shield remained in his air conditioned kennel, in the back of a police vehicle, while Lehner began his underwater exercise. Lehner was a skilled and passionate handler, Losi said, and Shield had learned to wait patiently for Lehner to return.

Yet it was Losi and several other officers in his unit, hours later, who had to open the door and allow the 85-pound German Shepherd to get out.

"It was kind of spooky," Losi said. "We all got tears in our eyes and choked up a little. When we opened the door, he knocked us out of the way, myself and a couple of other handlers, and he ran down to the river and started running back and forth, searching."

The dog somehow understood. Lehner – an Army National Guard veteran of deployments to Iraq and Guantanamo Bay – [disappeared into the Niagara River](#) Friday during a training session with other police divers.

A furious search involving local, federal, state and Canadian agencies continued Saturday. As soon as he received word Friday that Lehner was missing, Losi and his K-9 officers hurried to Broderick Park, near Niagara Street, to aid in the effort. They returned to the park at 7 a.m. Saturday, when the search resumed.



Lehner earned powerful devotion from the other five members of the K-9 unit, Losi said.

"What I would say is that many of us are near the end of our careers," said Losi, 55, "and we all looked at him as our future. The challenge now will be finding someone to live up his standards. He already trained one dog, and he's a guy who would have trained many more dogs in his career."

As for Shield, Losi dropped the dog Saturday at a kennel often used by the K-9 unit. Police dogs are independent and strong-willed, Losi said, and it is difficult for one officer to watch another's dog, because the animals typically won't get along.

Lehner, a 9-year veteran of the department, has worked in the K-9 unit for just over a year.

"He was the No. 1 candidate in our selection process," Losi said, "and it was one of those times when you put a round peg into a round hole."

Losi described Lehner as a relentless worker who developed a powerful bond with his dog. Two weeks ago, Losi said, Lehner put Shield through some tests with Niagara Regional Police officers in Ontario, experts who handle recertification of police dogs.

"The trainer called to say, 'Wow,'" Losi said. "This dog is amazing."

That praise, by extension, was directed at Lehner. With the K-9 unit, he found a job that seemed to fit him perfectly. Losi said Shield was used primarily for locating narcotics, but the dog could also "find a bad guy hiding in a house."

Lehner enjoyed the job so much that he told Losi he had no other goal or ambition in the department.

"This was a guy who didn't need much supervision," Losi said.

He and Lehner often worked different shifts. The last time Losi saw him was last week, when they both stopped to get gasoline for their police vehicles at the department pumps.

"I asked him if he needed anything," Losi said, "and he said to me: 'I'm good.'" "You are good," Losi responded.

The officer endured personal tragedy earlier this year, Losi said, when Lehner's brother died in a construction accident.

Lehner took some bereavement time, and then returned to do his work with typical excellence, Losi said.

What Losi remembers about Lehner, beyond all else, is his devotion to his dog. He said Lehner recently acquired a new home in greater Buffalo, mainly to provide more yard space for Shield, a 4-year-old dog born in the Netherlands.

That loyalty existed from the moment Lehner saw the dog for the first time. He and Losi drove together to a training center near Rochester, which raises and sells the animals.

"He was over the moon," Losi said.

Police dogs can cost \$8,000 or more, he said. When the animals are the gifts of private contributors, the Buffalo police – out of appreciation at the gift – typically names the dog in honor of the donor.

Yet Lehner was in an unusual situation. Because the department purchased the dog directly, Lehner was free to give the animal whatever name he wished.

Losi and Lehner were driving home when Lehner made his suggestion. He asked Losi if he could call the dog "Shield" in honor of Buffalo Police Officer James Shields, who was killed in a 2002 car crash in Buffalo while responding to a robbery call.

Losi, who's been in charge of the unit for nine years, said naming dogs for fallen officers is a tradition in other departments, but it was the first time he's aware of it happening in Buffalo.

"The idea totally came from him," Losi said. Lehner read up on Shields' life, to the extent of knowing the kind of music he enjoyed. He placed Shields' family on his invitation list for a training graduation ceremony in Niagara Falls, Ont., a big moment for any officer who works with a police dog.

Jeannette Shields, 82, mother of James Shields, attended that ceremony. In a telephone conversation Saturday, she said Lehner's devotion has lasting resonance for the family.

"It means officers are never truly forgotten," she said Saturday.

The same thought occurred Friday to Losi, when a dog named Shield - with just one goal - ran straight to the river.

## **Buffalo Police Diver Disappears During Training Exercise in Niagara River**

<http://www.nydailynews.com/news/national/buffalo-police-diver-disappears-river-training-exercise-article-1.3562890>

October 14, 2017 [TERENCE CULLEN](#) NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

A search is underway for a Buffalo cop missing for more than a day after a diving exercise in upstate New York.

Craig Lehner, a diver and K-9 officer with the Buffalo Police Department, failed to resurface during a Friday afternoon training session along the Niagara River.

The NYPD loaned its 3-D sonar equipment to help find Lehner, police said Saturday.

More than a dozen agencies — including the U.S. Coast Guard and Canadian authorities — have pitched in to find Lehner, who joined the police force in 2008, according to the Buffalo News.



**Missing BPD Diver Is 34-Year-Old Craig Lehner** <http://on.wgrz.com/2yLp47T>

The search paused at dusk Saturday and will continue Sunday morning to an area off the city's Broderick Park, where Lehner entered the water more than a day earlier.

Buffalo Police Lt. Jeff Rinaldo noted the powerful river's surface is a challenge because "obstacles, debris, downed trees, rocks, shopping carts, cars, over the years things found themselves in the water right there."

"Unfortunately, this is a very, very dangerous section to dive in," Rinaldo told reporters Saturday morning. "It is extremely dangerous, and that's why our team trains for these situations."

A cable that connected Lehner to his boat "parted," the Coast Guard said in a news release.



**Several agencies joined the search through the powerful river.** (WKBW)

Lehner joined the 14-member Underwater Recovery Team about a year ago, [NBC affiliate WGRZ reported](#).

The unmarried 34-year-old served in the Army National Guard before joining the police force nine years ago, [the Buffalo News reported](#). He was deployed to Iraq and Guantanamo Bay.

His full-time assignment was to Buffalo PD's K-9 unit, partnered with a 4-year-old German shepherd named Shield. The dog was briefly at the scene Saturday, the Buffalo News noted.

## Weather May Impact Search For Diver Craig Lehner

<http://www.wgrz.com/mobile/article/news/local/weather-may-impact-search-for-diver-craig-lehner/71-483167667>

10/15/17 WGRZ

BUFFALO, NY — Crews continued their search for missing Buffalo Police diver Craig Lehner Saturday.

Buffalo Police say their 14-member Underwater Recovery Team was participating in a routine training session just before 1 p.m. Friday when Lehner went missing in the Niagara River.



Buffalo Police Lt. Jeff Rinaldo, Mayor Byron Brown, and Erie County District Attorney John Flynn provided updates throughout the day about the continued search efforts.

Boats were on the river by 7:30 a.m. and divers were back in the water by 8 a.m. Weather may disrupt the search on Sunday. Weather conditions may be too dangerous for crews to go out on the already-rough waters.

Lt. Rinaldo said the efforts are still classified as a search and rescue mission at this point. He said the search is concentrated on the area near the break wall where Lehner first entered the water Friday and the international bridge.

"You know where the diver went in, and you know where suddenly the diver's movement ceased. And we kind of focus in on that area," Rinaldo said.



Helicopters are being used to search the shoreline for any evidence, and cadaver dogs are being used to helpfully narrow down the search area.

The NYPD is sending high tech sonar and specialized divers to



Buffalo to aid in the search for Officer Lehner. The Navy offered up similar resources.

More than 20 agencies have assisted in the search.



**Law enforcement agencies from all over WNY and Canada assist in trying to locate missing Buffalo Police officer Craig Lehner. Lehner went missing during a training exercise in the Niagara River. (Photo: WGRZ)**

"We didn't have to make one call for assistance," Rinaldo said. "The calls started within an hour of the emergency call going out, 'What do you need? How can we assist?' It's heartwarming. It definitely makes us proud to be in law enforcement, and we're doing the best that we can to just search for our brother."

Lt. Rinaldo once again stressed how challenging the conditions can be in that search area. There is a lot of debris beneath the surface, and the current is incredibly strong.



Divers who are participating in the search efforts have air tanks and weight belts that can add 40 to 80 pounds. Divers are entering the river near the Peace Bridge, and despite the added weight, they still drift rather quickly to the search area because of the intense current.



Officer Lehner, 34, joined the force in 2008. He has been with Underwater Recovery Team for about a year.

An hours-long search was suspended at 9 p.m. Friday because of darkness. A robotic search was supposed to continue overnight, but the Buffalo Police Department's Twitter page says they have been pulled due to "unsafe conditions."

"These are very dangerous waters to do diving in. At least once a month we train in these waters," Rinaldo said. "Unfortunately, sometimes training can be very dangerous," Buffalo Police Lt. Jeff Rinaldo said.

"The water moves anywhere from 12 to 15 knots and under the water there's a number of serious, serious obstacles — debris, down trees, shopping carts, rocks, cars."

The Coast Guard was first notified just after 1 p.m. Friday. It says that a tender cable, which connects the diver to the boat, had "parted." Originally the Coast Guard said that the diver's secondary dive tanks were also recovered on the water's surface. However, Buffalo Police say those tanks belonged to a boat and not the diver.

Several agencies are assisting Buffalo Police including local, county and state police and fire departments, the U.S. Coast Guard and Canadian authorities.



**Law enforcement agencies from all over WNY and Canada assist in trying to locate missing Buffalo Police officer Craig Lehner. Lehner went missing during a training exercise in the Niagara River. (Photo: WGRZ)**

"We're a family. As you saw, every uniform from here to Rochester was down here offering assistance. We pull together. We have a job to do right now, that's to help find our brother," Rinaldo said.

## **Missing Buffalo Police Diver: Search To Become Recovery Effort**

<http://www.democratandchronicle.com/story/news/2017/10/15/missing-buffalo-police-diver-search-moves-north-niagara-river/765943001/>

Oct. 15, 2017 by Victoria E. Freile Updated Oct. 16, 2017

BUFFALO — The search for a missing Buffalo police diver Craig Lehner has moved north in the Niagara River.

Officer Lehner has been missing since Friday afternoon. He was on a training dive with other members of the department's Underwater Recovery Team when a cable that connected Lehner to a boat either came unhooked or broke.

The search, which was suspended Sunday afternoon due to rough water conditions, resumed Monday morning.

Lt. Jeff Rinaldo said when Lehner is located, the operation will become a recovery.

"The reality is the reality, and unfortunately, the chances of somebody surviving these conditions is all but non-existent at this point," Rinaldo told reporters Sunday afternoon.

On Saturday, search efforts were focused in the area between the Peace Bridge and international train bridges. Police narrowed it down to that area using photos, footage from city surveillance cameras, and rope recovered in the water.

Nearly a dozen divers from the Rochester Police Department are among the multiple police agencies assisting with the search, said Deputy Chief Scott Peters. Divers searched in the river Saturday and Sunday, "but couldn't do much today because of Sunday's rain."

Sunday's storm impaired divers' visibility underwater, he said. Rochester divers will assist daily until Buffalo police tell Rochester officers their help is not needed, Peters said.



**Craig Lehner (Photo: WGRZ)**

"Whenever any other agency asks us for help, it's just natural. We look out for our brothers," Peters said.

For Rochester officers, the search for a missing diver hits close to home. In 1984, Officer Ronald Siver died during a training dive, "so our officers fully understand what Buffalo Police Department is going through," Peters said.

The police department vows to keep at it until they find Officer Lehner.

"Our mission focus now is to bring our brother home and bring that closure first and foremost to his family, secondly to the men and women of the Buffalo Police Department," Lt. Rinaldo said.

### A Lot Of Debris, Obstacles And Currents To Deal With



[pic.twitter.com/OYU3SljdFb](https://pic.twitter.com/OYU3SljdFb)

— RocNY PD Ops (@RocPDNYOps) [October 15, 2017](#)

Officer Craig Lehner, a member of Buffalo's K-9 unit and Underwater Recovery Team, went missing Friday afternoon during a training exercise on the Niagara River.

"The strength of this family is incredible. The mom, the sister, the friends, the family, the husband of the sister. That's what's driving us. They are extremely strong. They are extremely appreciative. They want to find their loved one as we do. That's our common goal," said Lt. Rinaldo.

### Search Resumes For Body Of Missing Ny Police Diver

<https://www.policeone.com/Officer-Safety/articles/431293006-Search-resumes-for-body-of-missing-NY-police-diver/>

Oct 16, 2017 Associated Press

#### **The search for Officer Craig Lehner that began on Friday afternoon is now a recovery mission**

BUFFALO, N.Y. — Police divers are back in the Niagara River to search for the body of an officer who [went missing during a training dive](#).

The Buffalo Police Department said Sunday that the search for Officer Craig Lehner that began on Friday afternoon is now a recovery mission.

Authorities say Lehner was participating in a training exercise on the river at Buffalo when he went missing. Police, emergency crews and the U.S. Coast Guard participated in the search, which resumed Monday morning after being suspended Sunday because of rough conditions.

Police dive teams from Rochester and other jurisdictions are helping with the search.

## Day 4: Still No Sign Of Missing Bpd Diver

<http://www.wkbw.com/news/day-4-still-no-sign-of-missing-bpd-diver>

Oct 16, 2017 by Ed Reilly

BUFFALO, N.Y (WKBW) - Crews from at least 20 agencies have been helping Buffalo Police look for one of its divers who went missing during a training exercise on the Niagara River this past Friday October 13, 2017.

Craig Lehner, 34, was a member of the Buffalo Police Underwater Recovery Team. Over the course of four days, crews from both sides of the border have been trying to find Lehner with helicopters, robotic cameras, divers and sophisticated sonar equipment.

Buffalo Police were hoping to finally find their "lost brother"

but conditions on the Niagara River were not favorable with visibility near zero - thanks to a strong storm on Sunday that churned up Lake Erie and the river.

According to Buffalo Police Spokesperson Lt. Jeff Rinaldo, crews received additional assistance from the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers which provided two boats with advanced side-sonar equipment. The U.S. Coast Guard also did an analysis of the water currents at the time of Lehner's disappearance to try and pinpoint where the fast moving water may have carried him.

Adding to the complications is a large debris field in the Niagara River that, combined with swift waters, is making it challenging for sonar because of reflections and false readings.



**Search resumes Monday am for missing BPD Officer Craig Lehner. Dozens of police, firefighters here by Niagara River. Maki Becker**



## Sean Kirst: A photographer captures lasting image of Officer Craig Lehner

<http://buffalonews.com/2017/10/16/sean-kirst-buffalo-born-photographer-lasting-image-officer-craig-lehner/>

October 16, 2017 By Sean Kirst Updated October 17, 2017

The encounter, brief and unforgettable, returned to Shannon Davis as soon as she read the news reports. She is an Atlanta photographer, born in Buffalo, who's been working for two years on a photo essay about her hometown. Her focus is capturing the lives of everyday people in the city's Old First Ward.



**Buffalo Police Officer Craig Lehner in July at the K-9 training area, Louisiana Street.**

**(Photo courtesy of Shannon Davis)**

Three months ago, in July, Buffalo Police Officer Sean Zoll agreed to give Davis a tour of the ward, as he knows it. "He patrols that neighborhood, he cares about it and he's very passionate about it," Davis said. Just before dusk, they stopped at the police department's K-9 training space, in an old industrial area along Louisiana Street.

For many reasons – because of the solitude of the spot, because of the setting sun – the moment made an impression on Davis, even before everything that happened Friday.

Yet it takes on lasting importance because of her conversation with Officer Craig Lehner.



Lehner, 34, a nine-year veteran of the police department, has been missing since he vanished Friday during a training session for Buffalo police divers in the Niagara River. For the past four days, multiple local, state, federal and Canadian agencies have [joined forces in a furious and difficult search](#).

Zoll introduced Davis to Lehner, who joined the K-9 unit about a year ago. Lehner told Davis about his dog Shield, a 4-year-old German shepherd purchased by the Buffalo police from a training center near Rochester. As they spoke, Davis said, the dog – intent and preoccupied – wandered in circles in the training area, nose down, sniffing the ground.

"He never stopped working," Davis said of Shield.

Lehner told her the dog, born in the Netherlands, answered at first only to commands in German. Lehner responded by teaching himself enough German to make it easier on the dog. That kind of devotion helped explain the electric and palpable connection Davis felt between the officer and the animal.

Other officers have spoken of how Lehner was a distinct individual, a well-read guy who could thoughtfully discuss a range of topics, a guy who followed a disciplined fitness regimen.

As a photographer, Davis said, she was struck by the way he wore his hair and the elaborate tattoos on his arms – his spiked hair, she said, "almost reminded me of flames" – but what she found most memorable was his demeanor:

"There was a soul, a humility, in a very calm way," she said. "Unlike a lot of people, he didn't want to talk about himself. He was just so proud of his dog. He just seemed like such a sensitive, thoughtful person."

Lehner served in both Iraq and Guantanamo Bay with the Army National Guard. Davis photographed him with Shield, then spontaneously asked if she could take one portrait of Lehner, alone. Looking back on it, she is grateful for both images. She felt one captured Lehner's pride and love for his dog, as well as Shield's intensity, the way the animal never paused from doing the job.



**Buffalo Police Officer Craig Lehner with his dog Shield at the K-9 training area on Louisiana Street.  
(Photo courtesy of Shannon Davis)**

But she is especially pleased with the second photo of Lehner at ease. "When you see his expression, the calm, the soulfulness, the way he's so open and unguarded, that's exactly who I felt I was looking at," she said.

Lehner explained to Davis how Shield received his name, how Lehner named the dog for Buffalo Police Officer James Shields, killed in a 2002 automobile accident while responding to a robbery call. Davis, struck by Lehner's intensity and sincerity, joked with him that she could do an entire calendar on him alone, and said that at some point she hoped to photograph him again.

It was getting dark, but the training area was illuminated. Lehner told her he planned on staying late to work with Shield, and Davis asked him if that didn't make him feel alone.

"It's not lonely," Lehner said. "I've got my dog."

## Body Of Missing Buffalo Police Diver Craig Lehner Recovered On 5th Day Of Search

[http://www.newyorkupstate.com/buffalo/2017/10/body\\_of\\_missing\\_buffalo\\_police\\_diver\\_craig\\_lehner\\_recovered\\_on\\_5th\\_day\\_of\\_search.html](http://www.newyorkupstate.com/buffalo/2017/10/body_of_missing_buffalo_police_diver_craig_lehner_recovered_on_5th_day_of_search.html)

October 17, 2017 By [Ben Axelson](#) NYup.com

On the fifth day of search efforts missing [Buffalo](#) police diver Craig Lehner, recovery teams were finally able to locate and retrieve his body from the rapid currents of the Niagara River.

Police announced the recovery shortly after 3 p.m., the [Buffalo News](#) reported.

"It's a very tragic event, but thankfully we were able to bring our officer back,"

Buffalo Police Commissioner Derenda told reporters at a news conference.

A procession brought Lehner's remains to Erie County Medical Center. Police and firefighters lined I-190 to pay their respects to the fallen officer.

According to the News, a boat equipped with sonar spotted an image believed to be Lehner's body on Monday, but it was too late in the day to attempt a dive. Tuesday, recovery teams located the body about 160 feet off shore.



**With the body of Diver [#CraigLehner](#) in tow, a procession of [#BPD](#) "bring their brother home" entering RT190N on way to ECMC. Very touching! [3:44 PM - Oct 17, 2017](#)**

I join with all City of Buffalo residents in mourning the loss of this outstanding public servant," Mayor Byron Brown said in a statement. "My thoughts and prayers are with his loved ones, including his Mother, as well as the Buffalo Police Underwater Recovery Team and the many dedicated local, state, federal and Canadian first responders, who worked tirelessly in the search and recovery effort."



**Officers stand at attention as procession escorting body of BPD Officer Craig Lehner passes on 198 en route to ECMC  
3:48 PM - Oct 17, 2017**

Lehner [went missing Friday](#) during a dive training exercise. Details of what went wrong have yet to be revealed.

## Pence Calls Mother Of Buffalo Police Diver Who Died

<http://thehill.com/blogs/blog-briefing-room/355888-pence-calls-mother-of-missing-buffalo-police-diver>

BY JOSH DELK - 10/17/17



**BPD officers salute from the pedestrian bridge over 198 as BPD officer Lehner procession passes en route to ECM**



Vice President Pence on Tuesday called the mother of Buffalo police diver [Craig Lehner](#), whose body was recovered after he went missing during a training exercise last week.



Pence offered Lehner's mother his condolences while heading toward Joint Base Andrews on Tuesday, according to a pool report. Pence also made calls to Buffalo's deputy police commissioner and mayor.

Lehner, 34, a member of the Buffalo Police Underwater Recovery Team, went missing on Friday during a routine exercise in the Niagara river after his tender cable became detached, according to [WBFO](#).

Lehner's body was later recovered on Tuesday, WBFO reported. The cause of death wasn't clear from initial reports.

It is unclear if Pence called the officer's mother before or after Lehner's body was discovered.

Pence's call comes after President Trump suggested in a press conference Monday that former President Obama [did not call](#) the families of fallen service members, a claim disputed by top members of the previous administration.

## **Emotional Release As Body Of Fallen Bpd Diver Is Found**

<http://www.wben.com/articles/emotional-release-body-fallen-bpd-diver-found>

OCTOBER 14, 2017 (CURIOUS THAT THE LINK HAS CHANGED!)

## **Mayor Brown: the Tragedy showed the City at its Best**

**BUFFALO, N.Y. (WBEN)** - As difficult as the last six days have been for the Buffalo Police Department, Mayor Byron Brown says it has shown the best of Buffalo.

The Mayor says he is incredibly proud of the entire Police Department for their "selfless, dedicated work". Adding, "it was an amazing job under most difficult circumstances".

One member in particular stands out. "Lt. Jeff Rinaldo was a Rock, with timely and accurate information". Rinaldo became the face of the search by holding daily news briefings, often multiple briefings each day on the status of the search.

Mayor Brown also relayed an important phone call that he received Tuesday. "I got a call from Vice President Pence who expressed his condolences to me, the Buffalo PD and the community".

Buffalo Police recovered the missing Buffalo Police Officer Craig Lehner, according to Buffalo Police Lieutenant Jeff Rinaldo who made the announcement shortly after 2 p.m. on Tuesday.

A procession carrying Lehner's body to ECMC prompted some brief traffic closures.

**DETAILS & VIDEO:** [Procession in honor of a fallen hero](#)

Lehner went missing during a training mission with Buffalo Police's Underwater Rescue Team on Friday afternoon. At least 19 different agencies searched for the 34-year-old officer.

Lt. Jeff Rinaldo said Lehner was discovered at 1:25pm Tuesday. "Sonar searches last night helped aid in the discovery of Lehner," says Rinaldo. One of the Sonar boats saw an image near the international railroad bridge last night. Today, the Buffalo Police Underwater Recovery Team went to that scene, and recovered the body there. "At the point they got there, the body was starting to surface," says Commissioner Dan Derenda.

**PERSPECTIVE:** ['Shield' of protection for us all - Tim Wenger](#)

Rinaldo gives police teams credit. "They conducted themselves as professionals, never once was there any ego or lack of cooperation. Everybody showed up at the foot of Ferry at 7am, saying let's get him home," says Rinaldo. Now, officers are wrestling with the emotions that Lehner's gone, but also proud they've brought him home.

Funeral arrangements have yet to be announced.

**PHOTOS:** [Gallery of photos on final day of search](#)

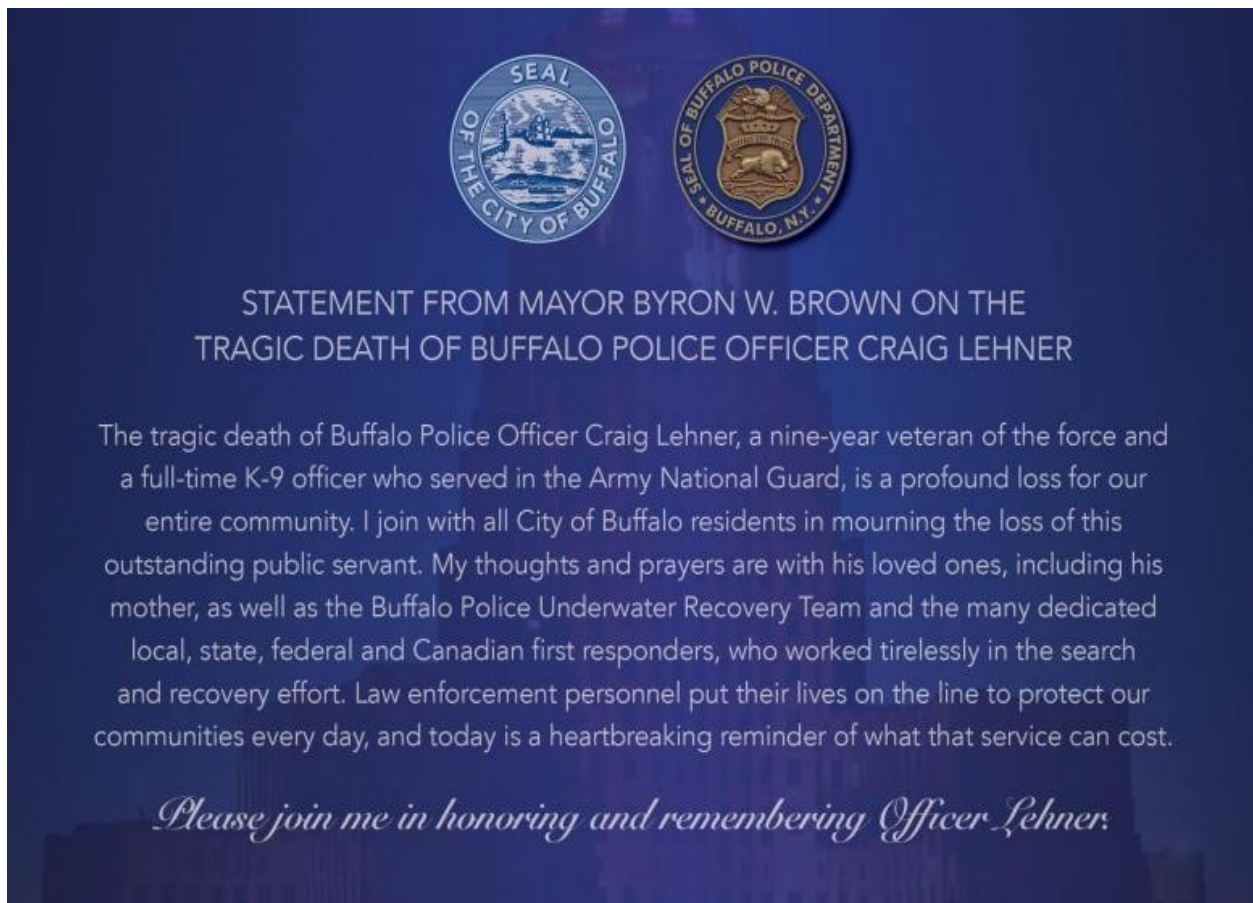


The dome at City Hall will remain blue Tuesday evening in Lehner's memory. The Buffalo and Fort Erie Public Bridge Authority will light the Peace Bridge in blue in honor of Buffalo Police Officer Craig Lehner.

Vice President Mike Pence, who was in town for a tax reform roundtable, offered his thoughts. "Our hearts are with the family of Buffalo Police diver Craig Lehner, who was missing in the Niagara River. We mourn with those who mourn and grieve with those who grieve. We assure this courageous officer and his family will remain in our prayers. The debt we owe to men and women who put on the uniforms who leave their homes and families to protect ours we can never fully repay," says Pence.

Lehner, a nine-year veteran of the force, was a member of Buffalo's K-9 unit and underwater recovery team.

Mayor Byron Brown issued this statement:



## Buffalo Police Have A Good Idea Where Lehner Got In Trouble

<http://www.wkbw.com/news/buffalo-police-have-a-good-idea-where-lehner-got-in-trouble>

Oct 17, 2017 *WKBW Staff*



BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) - Buffalo police have entered day five of the search for police diver Craig Lehner, who went missing Friday, in the Niagara River.

Police are using a grid pattern search. They plan on moving north along the Niagara River from the foot of Ferry Avenue.

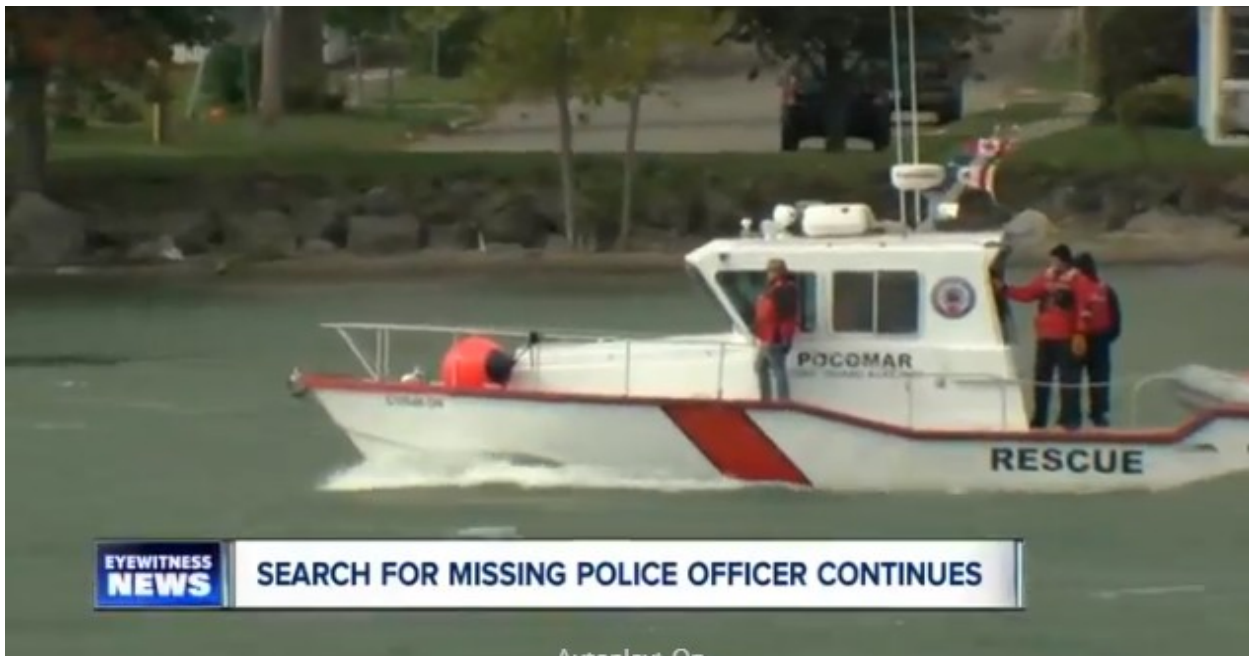
Crews plan on using 3-D mapping boats, brought in from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Buffalo police Lt. Jeff Rinaldo told 7 Eyewitness News, "This is extremely complicated. The weather we had two days ago complicated yesterday's search."

### INVESTIGATION INTO WHAT WENT WRONG

As the investigation into what happened to Officer Lehner continues, police say they know exactly where Lehner went into the water.

Divers walked up the break wall, 50 feet north of where the park ends and then went over the rocks to get in, according to Rinaldo.



Rindaldo said the current in the river takes you to an eddy, near the concession stands, that suck divers in, close to the wall.

We've learned divers were attached to a tether, Friday, while performing a routine training mission in the river. But something happened about 12:50 p.m. Friday.





Police say Lehner's line detached from a main line Friday afternoon. The line was 400 feet long. After retrieving the line, police say the snag was on 75 feet of line attached to the diver.

"We have a good idea of the area where the diver got in trouble," Rinaldo said.

The issue facing recovery crews is what's in the water and current. "There's many possibilities including the diver being in the same exact location or he could have been pulled down by the current," Rinaldo said.

### **IS THERE A BUDDY SYSTEM?**

Each tether is connected to a line that is held on shore. As for a buddy system, or someone being with Lehner, Rinaldo said you cannot stack divers next to each other because of the current. If they were to have divers next to each other, Rinaldo said divers would get tangled, creating a safety issue.

As divers go into the water, Rinaldo said their lines produce slack going up river. That was a signal the diver was hung up on something. All efforts to 'unsnag,' Rinaldo said, were unsuccessful.

Buffalo police have said they will never stop searching the Niagara River for Officer Craig Lehner. After five days, the extent of future recovery efforts is still unclear.



## Body Of Buffalo Police Diver Recovered From Niagara River

<http://www.foxnews.com/us/2017/10/18/body-buffalo-police-diver-recovered-from-niagara-river.html>  
10-18-2017 [Associated Press](#)

BUFFALO, N.Y. – Buffalo police have found the body of an officer who went missing during a training dive in the Niagara River.

The Buffalo Police Department said Tuesday that the body of 34-year-old Officer Craig Lehner was recovered in the area where a search had been going on since Friday afternoon.

Authorities say Lehner was participating in a routine training exercise on the river at Buffalo near Unity Island when he failed to resurface. Police, emergency crews and the U.S. Coast Guard participated in the search.

A procession brought Lehner's body to Erie County Medical Center as police and firefighters lined the route.

Lehner, a nine-year veteran of the force, was a member of Buffalo's K-9 unit and underwater recovery team.

## Tragedy Of Police Diver Disappearing Unfolded In Just 30 Minutes

<http://buffalonews.com/2017/10/19/details-desperate-attempt-save-buffalo-police-diver/>  
October 19, 2017 By Lou Michel



**Search and rescue crews scour the Niagara River near Broderick Park at the foot of West Ferry Street Friday afternoon where Buffalo police diver Craig Lehner went missing during training exercises. (Derek Gee/Buffalo News)**

The emergency underneath the Niagara River went from bad to worse in no more than 30 minutes.

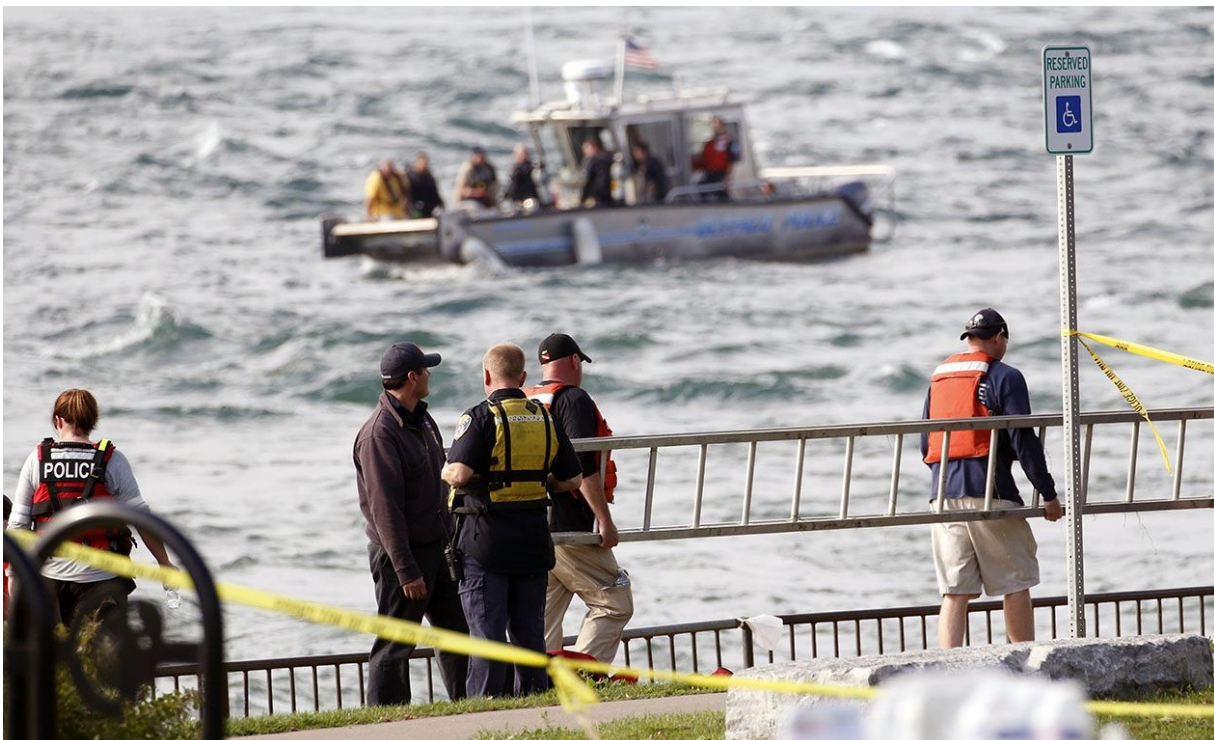
Officer Craig E. Lehner was alone in the river during an underwater recovery training session when the tender cable that connected him to colleagues on land became snagged on an unknown object, three police sources said Wednesday.

Team members on the Bird Island pier knew they had a serious problem when the line suddenly tightened. They let out more line and pulled it in different directions trying to free it and pull Lehner to the surface, said the sources who did not want to be identified because of the ongoing investigation.

When that did not work, two team members tethered themselves to Lehner's tender line and jumped in in an attempt to reach him some 25 feet under water.

But the swift current, moving at 12 mph or faster, was too strong, and they were forced to cut themselves loose from the line and surface, the sources said.

Team members next threaded an emergency air tank to the tender line and attempted to send it down to Lehner, but again the current proved too much and the tank would not sink to the river bottom. These desperate attempts to save Lehner rapidly unfolded starting at about 12:50 p.m.



**The search for Buffalo Police Officer Craig Lehner went on for days before the body of the missing diver was recovered. Now, investigators turn to figuring out what happened. (Sharon Cantillon/Buffalo News)**

They called for assistance, and the U.S. Coast Guard dispatched a 45-foot response boat that arrived at approximately 1:10 p.m., according to the Coast Guard.

With the tender cable extended to its full length, 300 feet, and attached to the boat, the Coast Guard crew pulled from different directions, hoping to un snag the line. Instead the line snapped, the police sources said.

The emergency air tank, which never made it to the bottom, was found floating near the pier.

Police estimate this all happened in about 30 minutes.

Investigators are trying to piece together what happened last Friday. But several questions still confront them in Lehner's death:

- How did the tender cable become hung up?
- Did the officer become entangled in debris littering the riverbed, preventing him from swimming to the surface?
- Was the line cut or broken, allowing the officer to drift north?
- Did Lehner hit his head on an object?
- Did his breathing apparatus somehow become dislodged from his mouth?

An autopsy was conducted Wednesday and police have Lehner's wet suit and diving equipment. They hope the autopsy and diving gear will provide some answers, but police say they may never know all of the answers.

"We're investigating the accident and we have a lot of questions, but at this time we do not have a lot of answers," Police Commissioner Daniel Derenda said.

Added Lt. Jeff Rinaldo: "Diving is so technical and there are so many variables. We may never know what happened."

He was referring to the large amount of debris on the riverbed.

Five days after Lehner went missing, at 1:25 p.m. Tuesday, the commander of the underwater rescue team and another team member spotted what looked like a black object in the water some 2,000 to 3,000 feet north of the International Railway Bridge and 160 feet off shore.

It was the fins Lehner was still wearing. His body had floated to the water's surface, despite a 40-pound diving belt and other heavy equipment, including his air tanks.

And still attached to the 34-year-old officer's diving equipment was several inches of his tender line, police said. The yellow line is a made of synthetic material, polypropylene, and is described on retail websites as lightweight, rot resistant and able to float. When the tender line snapped, some 225 feet of it was recovered, leaving about 75 feet under water.

Questions have been raised why Lehner was not equipped with a GPS to pinpoint his location, but authorities said global positioning system devices do not function under water.

Members of the underwater rescue team, including its commander, Detective Leo McGrath, have been given time off to recuperate from the intense search that occurred over five days, Rinaldo said at a Wednesday afternoon news conference in Police Headquarters.

Once team members return to work, they will be debriefed by the department's homicide detectives.

Rinaldo pointed out that it is standard procedure for homicide detectives to investigate in-the-line-of-duty deaths.

The state Department of Labor's public employee safety and health unit is also involved in the investigation. The Coast Guard does not have jurisdiction because the fatality did not involve a boating accident. Detectives are also expected to consult diving experts, Rinaldo said.

Police Officer John T. Kujawa, a K-9 officer and member of the underwater recovery team, said he was on the team's boat Tuesday when he and McGrath spotted the black object in the water.

"We didn't know what it was at first and we radioed to the Niagara Diver Rescue boat to check," Kujawa said of how they found Lehner. "You don't float to the surface with a 40-pound diver's belt and other equipment. To me, it was the Big Guy upstairs saying, 'Here's your diver.' I believe in God."

Lehner, who is single and joined the force in 2008, also served as a full-time K-9 officer. Described by police as an accomplished scuba diver since his days in the military, he tried out for the underwater recovery team last April, passed the different tests and was accepted onto the team.

When he served with the Army National Guard, he completed deployments to Iraq and the U.S. military base at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba.

Chief of Detectives Dennis J. Richards, who is serving as the department's protocol officer for the funeral, said he met Wednesday with Lehner's family and they are in the process of finalizing funeral arrangements.

The arrangements, Richards said, may be released sometime Thursday. Lehner will receive full police and military honors.

"His family is extremely grateful for the outpouring of support from the community and the nation," Richards said.



Rinaldo said, "We are expecting thousands and thousands of people to attend the funeral."

Rinaldo also again thanked the many agencies that assisted in the search and the local businesses that came forward offering food, hotel rooms and other supplies. "We didn't have to make a call," he said. "They called us."

## At riverside memorial, a handwritten note to Officer Lehner

<http://buffalonews.com/2017/10/19/makeshift-memorial-hand-written-note-officer-lehner-grateful-buffalonian/>

October 19, 2017 By [Aaron Besecker](#)

A handwritten letter sat along the edge of the Niagara River in Broderick Park on Thursday morning.

Below an American flag and beside a blue pumpkin and bouquets of flowers, the one-page note in blue cursive lettering was fastened to one of the bouquets.

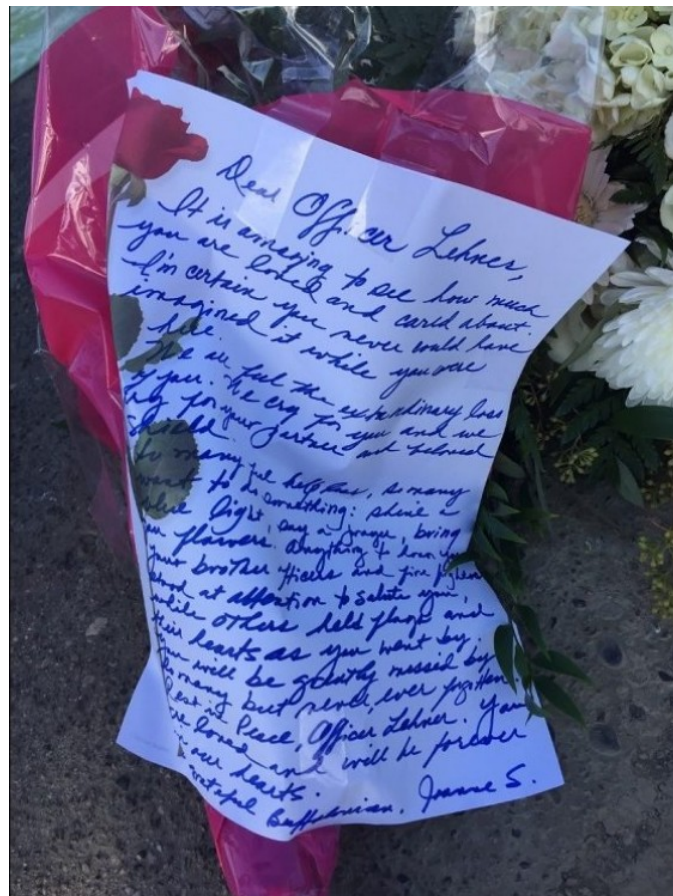
It was addressed to Buffalo Police Officer Craig E. Lehner.

The author described herself as "a grateful Buffalonian."

It was part of a makeshift memorial dedicated to Lehner, whose body was [found in the river Tuesday](#), five days after he went missing during a police dive team training exercise.

Here's the full text of the letter:

*Dear Officer Lehner,  
It is amazing to see how much you are loved and cared about. I'm certain you never could have imagined it while you were here.*



**A handwritten letter to Officer Craig Lehner is part of a makeshift memorial at Broderick Park in Buffalo.**

**(Aaron Besecker/ Buffalo News)**



**A memorial to fallen Buffalo Police Officer Craig Lehner at the edge of the Niagara River in Broderick Park. (Derek Gee/Buffalo News)**

*We all feel the extraordinary loss of you. We cry for you and we cry for your partner and beloved Shield.*

*So many feel helpless. So many want to do something: shine a blue light, say a prayer, bring you flowers, anything to honor you. Your brother officers and firefighters stood at attention to salute you while others held flags and their hearts as you went by. You will be greatly missed by so many but never, ever forgotten. Rest in peace, Officer Lehner. You are loved and will be forever in our hearts.*

*A grateful Buffalonian,  
Joanne S.*

## **Funeral Services Set For Ny Cop Killed During Training Dive**

<http://www.weny.com/story/36642494/funeral-services-set-for-ny-cop-killed-during-training-dive>

Oct 20, 2017 By Dan Schrack, Anchor/Reporter

**BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP)** - Funeral services are set next week for a Buffalopolice officer who died during a training dive in the Niagara River.

The Buffalo Police Department says calling hours for Officer Craig Lehner will be held from 3 p.m. to 8 p.m. Monday and Tuesday at Lakeside Memorial Funeral Home in the town of Hamburg.

His funeral will be held at 10 a.m. Wednesday at KeyBank Center in downtown Buffalo to accommodate the several thousand law enforcement officers expected to attend. He'll be buried in Forest Lawn Cemetery in Buffalo.

Officials say the 34-year-old Lehner was participating in a training exercise Oct. 13 when he failed to resurface. His body wasn't found until Tuesday. An investigation into his death is underway. Lehner, a nine-year veteran, was also a member of the department's K-9 unit.



## A Police Dispatcher's Emotional 'End Of Watch' Call For Fallen Police Diver

<http://buffalonews.com/2017/10/20/emotion-behind-dispatchers-end-watch-radio-call-fallen-police-diver/>

October 20, 2017 By Lou Michel

Hours after police recovered Officer Craig Lehner's body from the Niagara River on Tuesday, Buffalo police dispatchers were given the order to call for him one last time.

It's known as the end of watch call.

Three dispatchers were on duty, all of them distraught.

Susan Forero composed herself to make the call, knowing she would get no response.

**"Radio to K-9 43," she said.**

Then eight seconds of silence followed. Her voice trembling, Forero continued.

"K-9 43, we thank you for your service and may you rest in peace. Buffalo police radio 16:48."

That was the final radio transmission for the 34-year-old Lehner.

The military time of 16:48 translated to 4:48 p.m.

The broadcast of that last call has circulated widely in the past couple of days, and thousands have heard it.

"I broke at the end," Forero said Thursday.

She understands police work not only from her 11 years as a dispatcher but also from her husband, Martin, who served on the city police force for 25 years before retiring a few years ago.

She and another dispatcher handled the initial calls for assistance Friday when members of the underwater recovery team began calling shortly before 1 p.m. at the Bird Island Pier.

There was no time for emotion during those frantic moments.

"We had to work fast and get as many agencies involved as we could. The Coast Guard, Air One from the Erie County Sheriff's Office and Buffalo Fire," she said.

But after her shift ended and she returned home at 11 p.m. Friday, she shared what happened with her husband as he held her hand. She then broke down and cried.

He told her things would be OK. Yet the retired police accident investigator knew that was not entirely true. The long search would exact more emotional stress for everyone in the Buffalo Police Department.

"All police officers, dispatchers, police garage mechanics, the cleaners at police headquarters, we are all part of the same family and support network," said Martin Forero, who was grateful to be there for his wife.



**Susan Forero**

The Foreros spoke reluctantly to The Buffalo News, not wanting to insert themselves into news coverage that now shifts to a police funeral. More than 5,000 mourners are expected at Wednesday's services in the KeyBank Center.

Susan Forero called Tuesday's radio call one of the hardest she has had to make, but also one that held great honor.

"I only knew Craig to talk to him on the radio. I know a lot of officers through the radio. I never actually get to meet them, but in a sense I feel a connection. We talk to these officers every single day," she said.

Her husband knew Lehner, who joined the force in 2008.



"I remember when he first got on the job. I was working at the Traffic Violation Bureau, and it is one of the first stops for rookies," Martin Forero said. "They learn how to testify there because it is easygoing and less formal than a courtroom and if they have any fear of speaking in public, they overcome it.

"I clearly remember that Craig did not have any such fear," he said. "He was fearless. He spoke and could make his case. I was literally amazed at how well he understood the process. Very few rookies can take the stand with such confidence.

"He was in his mid-20s and you could see that he was just beaming with joy. You knew he wanted to be a cop," he said.

Still in touch with officers on the job, Martin Forero said that they now are paying Lehner the greatest tribute they can by remembering him and "doing the best job possible they can to honor him, just like he would have done."

As for Susan Forero, there was little time to grieve after her "end of watch" call for Lehner.

Somebody in the city was shooting a gun. She dispatched officers to the call.

## **Craig Lehner's Funeral Could Be Largest Ever Seen For A Buffalo Police Officer**

<http://buffalonews.com/2017/10/20/buffalo-police-officers-funeral-expected-largest-region-ever-seen/>

*October 20, 2017* By Lou Michel

Officer Craig E. Lehner's death was unlike any other the Buffalo Police Department has endured.

His funeral will not be like any other, either.

The 34-year-old officer's funeral Wednesday in KeyBank Center may be the largest police funeral in Western New York history.

The arena, home of the Buffalo Sabres, seats more than 19,000, so it should be able to accommodate all the police officers, first responders, soldiers, elected officials and members of the public expected to attend.

"The KeyBank Center is a venue that lends itself to the large anticipated crowd of mourners," said Chief of Detectives Dennis J. Richards, the department's protocol officer for the funeral.

Police are working to set up bus transportation for mourners from the arena to Forest Lawn and back, Richards said. That will help shorten what is expected to be a long procession, he said.

Past funerals for first responders who have died in the line of duty have been held at the Buffalo Niagara Convention Center, St. Joseph Catholic Cathedral, the Chapel at CrossPoint and smaller churches in the area.

In those cases, mourners at times spilled outside the buildings. That happened at the two police funerals in the Convention Center, which can accommodate up to 7,000, in 1997 and 1998, and at the funerals for two Buffalo firefighters at St. Joseph Cathedral, which seats about 1,100, in 2009.

Law enforcement agencies from as far away as New Mexico have contacted Buffalo Police to let them know they will attend the funeral of the police officer at 10 a.m. Wednesday. Numerous Canadian police departments also plan to attend.

And, with large contingents from regional agencies expected, Buffalo Police said it's impossible to estimate how many police and first responders will be present.

At past police funerals, Richards said, the number has been about 5,000.

Many first responders who came here to assist in the five-day search for Lehner may return for the funeral. Estimates ranged from in the hundreds to as many as 1,000 for the people who helped in one way or another with the search after Lehner



**The Buffalo Sabres held a moment of silence for fallen Officer Craig Lehner before Friday night's game. (James P. McCoy/Buffalo News)**

disappeared during an underwater recovery practice off Bird Island pier a week ago Friday. His body was recovered from the Niagara River Tuesday afternoon.

Police Commissioner Daniel Derenda expressed gratitude to the Buffalo Sabres for making the center available for the Lehner service. "I contacted Mike Gilbert and Stan Makowski, and they graciously donated their building to allow us to have the funeral there," Derenda said, of the two Sabres executives.

### **Divers, K-9 teams coming from around the United States**

Police dive teams from around the country are planning to be here for Lehner's funeral. So are police K-9 teams.

Besides serving on the department's underwater recovery team, Lehner worked as a K-9 officer with his partner, Shield, a 4-year-old German shepherd. Shield will be present for the funeral, as well.

Military personnel also are expected that day.

Lehner served as an Army National Guard military police officer for 16 years, assigned to the 105<sup>th</sup> Military Police Company at Masten Armory in Buffalo. A staff sergeant, he was deployed to Iraq in 2011 and served at Guantanamo Bay detention facility in Cuba, starting in 2014 and ending that deployment in 2015.

During his time in the service, he was awarded more than a dozen medals, including the Army Commendation Medal, Air Assault Badge, Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal and five Army Achievement Medals. He left the service in 2016.

An Army National Guard honor guard will be present, along with a Buffalo Police honor guard and honor guards from numerous other agencies, according to Buffalo Police.

Richards and other department members have worked closely with Lehner's family in making the funeral arrangements.

Lehner is survived by his mother, Kathleen Lehner; sisters Donna Wilson, Linda Iannuzzi, Kerry Koch, Cherelyn Hughes; and a brother, Michael Lehner. He was predeceased by his father, Donald Lehner, and two other brothers, Thomas Lehner and Jeffrey Latka.

Many elected officials are planning to attend the funeral and some are making special arrangements to pay tribute to Lehner. State Assemblywoman Crystal Peoples-Stokes, D-Buffalo, and State Sen. Timothy Kennedy, D-Buffalo, are introducing a joint resolution to honor Lehner for his life and service. The State Legislature is also expected to approve a Liberty Medal that will be presented to his family at the funeral.



**The dome of Buffalo City Hall is illuminated in blue in honor of Craig Lehner as dusk settles over the city Oct. 20.  
(Derek Gee/Buffalo News)**

Lieutenant Gov. Kathy Hochul, State Senator Chris Jacobs, R-Buffalo, and Assemblyman Sean Ryan, D-Buffalo, are among those planning to attend.

Sen. Charles E. Schumer, D-N.Y., has reached out to Mayor Byron W. Brown and the Buffalo Police Benevolent Association to offer his condolences to Lehner's family, police officers and the city.

Assemblyman Michael P. Kearns, D-Buffalo, also plans to attend.



"There is no greater love than this, than to lay down one's life for another,' Officer Craig Lehner made the ultimate sacrifice, and we will be forever grateful," Kearns said, in a statement Friday on the officer's death.

Following a wake set for Monday and Tuesday at Lakeside Memorial Funeral Home in Hamburg, a private prayer service will held Wednesday morning.

After that, Lehner's body will be transported in a Harley-Davidson motorcycle hearse to KeyBank Center, with an escort provided by the Buffalo Police Department, which has invited the Patriot Guard Riders to participate.

"We want people to understand that this is not a parade; it is a solemn and dignified escort," said Don Higgins, senior ride captain for the Patriot Guard, which provides escorts for veterans. "To stand along the route with a flag or your hand across your heart – that would be wonderful."





**OFFICER CRAIG LEHNER**  
BUFFALO POLICE DEPARTMENT

**VISITATION HOURS**  
Monday, October 23 • 3:00 pm to 8:00 pm / Tuesday, October 24 • 3:00 pm to 8:00 pm  
Lakeside Memorial Funeral Home, 4199 Lakeshore Road, Hamburg, NY

**OFF-SITE PARKING FOR THOSE ATTENDING THE VISITATION:**  
St. Francis of Assisi Church, 4263 St Francis Drive, Hamburg, NY  
Woodlawn Beach Parking Lot, 3580 Lake Shore Road, Blasdell, NY  
*(The Fisher Bus Company will dedicate a shuttle to each location)*

---

**FUNERAL SERVICE**  
Wednesday, October 25 • 10:00 am  
Key Bank Center, 1 Seymour Knox III Plaza, Buffalo, NY

---

Monetary donations for the Lehner family can be made directly to the Buffalo Police PBA / 74 Franklin Street / Buffalo, NY 14202

***Details about the services, provided by the Buffalo Police Department.***

That procession will travel along Route 5 into downtown Buffalo, where streets around KeyBank Center will be closed.

Following the funeral, more streets will be temporarily closed to accommodate what is anticipated to be a lengthy procession.

The procession route to Forest Lawn will be as follows:

North on Michigan Avenue to Scott Street, heading west to Upper Terrace and veering onto Franklin Street, heading north past Buffalo Police headquarters. The procession will continue to Niagara Street, passing the former Michael J. Dillon U.S. Courthouse, which is the future home of Buffalo Police headquarters.

In Niagara Square, the procession will head north on Delaware Avenue to Forest Lawn at Delaware and West Delavan avenues.

"We are asking that downtown workers and others avoid these areas and use alternate routes if they are not attending the funeral," Richards said.

**Basics of the wake and funeral**

Here are some key details about the services for Lehner.

**The wake:** Will be held from 3 to 8 p.m. Monday and Tuesday in Lakeside Memorial Funeral Home, 4199 Lake Shore Road, Hamburg. Off-site parking is available at St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church, 4263 St. Francis Drive, Hamburg, and in the parking lot at Woodlawn Beach, 3580 Lake Shore Road, Hamburg.

Also after 3:30 p.m. both days, parking will be available at St. Francis High School, 4129 Lake Shore Road.

**Shuttle bus service:** Will be available at the auxiliary parking lots, according to Charles A. Castiglia, president of Lakeside Memorial Funeral Home. With about 100 parking spots on the funeral home property, he said, there will be a total of 650 parking spots.

**Flag lines:** Patriot Guard Riders will surround the funeral home with American flags.

**The service:** Presiding over the funeral service will be the Rev. David Beutel, pastor of Redeemer Lutheran Church, North Tonawanda.

## Why An Entire Community Grieves ... And Shows The Blue

<http://buffalonews.com/2017/10/22/entire-community-grieves-together/>

**October 22, 2017** By *Robert J. McCarthy*



**The dome of City Hall is lit blue to honor fallen Buffalo Police Officer Craig Lehner, Friday, Oct. 20, 2017.  
(Derek Gee/Buffalo News)**

Ray Brown was returning from a fare to Niagara Falls Saturday morning when he found himself turning into Buffalo's Broderick Park.

He got out of his mini-van cab and slowly walked to the makeshift memorial springing up on the park's edge, just above the rushing waters of the Niagara River. He snapped a photo on his cell phone, and then he stood quietly for just a moment, looking at the collection of flags, candles, blue pumpkins and letters with envelopes marked "Craig."

"He was serving his people, the people of Western New York," Brown said. "I just wanted to come and show my respect."

That's just one of the little stories resulting from the death of Craig Lehner, the Buffalo police diver lost to the Niagara River while training there with his Underwater Recovery Team. Divers and searchers spent five days before finding and retrieving the body of their comrade, and the saga weighed heavy on thousands of hearts throughout the region.

Maybe that is because Lehner was just 34, with so many friends and admirers. Or maybe because he served not only as a police officer, but as a K-9 handler and emergency diver. Or because Lehner also had been military policeman with the National Guard in Iraq.

Now all these little stories are about to converge into one great, big story Wednesday when thousands – including police officers from all over the United States and Canada – converge on KeyBank Center for Lehner's funeral. Politicians, police officials and ordinary citizens alike say they can't remember such a collective reaction.

"This was so prolonged," Dennis J. Richards, the Buffalo Police Department's chief of detectives and protocol officer, said Saturday of the five-day search. "And it caused all kinds of people to band together to rescue him, and then, unfortunately, to recover him."

All of Lehner's first responder roles combined to "magnify" the tragedy, Richards added.

Police officers, K-9 handlers, dive team members, and military veterans all plan to send contingents to the arena on Wednesday. Count the public in on that, too. "Someone who brought down a dozen donuts or food feels they need to be there," Richards said. "There's just been this tremendous outpouring. This has become such a different experience because of his lifetime of service."

On Saranac Avenue in North Buffalo on Saturday, a handmade poster was pasted over the Saranac Central Block Association sign.

"SCBA Thanks BPD and Remembers K-9 43," the poster read, recalling Lehner's police dog handler badge.





**People pick out a blue pumpkins to buy at the Great Pumpkin Farm in Clarence Saturday, October 21, 2017. All was part of "Operation Shield's Pumpkin Patch" put on by WNY Heroes, The Great Pumpkin Farm in Clarence, Home Depot and former members of the 105th Military Police. They sold blue painted pumpkins and tee shirts to benefit officer Craig Lehner's family.  
(Mark Mulville/Buffalo News)**

Neighbors along the street enjoy a close association with police officers and firefighters, many of whom live on Saranac, said block club president Vincent Gregory.

"We see the officers professionally and non-professionally on Hertel Avenue every day," Gregory said. "They're basically part of our lives."

When neighbors called him following Lehner's death, they realized they could at least show support. Blue ribbons now adorn many of the lamp posts in front of Saranac's well-kept homes.

"It's just a way of letting the police know we appreciate and understand," Gregory said.

Neighbors also are talking about establishing a local dog park in honor of Lehner and his K-9 partner, Shield, he said.

Similar sentiments occurred Friday at Makowski School 99 on Jefferson Avenue. Students there made cards to show support for the Police Department and the



Lehner family. They also crafted a special basket that will be presented to officers Monday morning.

Then there was the blue ice at KeyBank Arena Friday night, when the Buffalo Sabres stood for a moment of silence Friday before their game with the Vancouver Canucks. Blue light bathes City Hall's tower and the span of the Peace Bridge. And blue lights flicker on at homes throughout the area.

It's a lot of little things.

At the Great Pumpkin Farm in Clarence Saturday, the usual fall frolic seemed tempered by K-9 officers of the Buffalo police and Erie County Sheriff's Office. The officers posed for photos with kids, while members of the WNY Heroes organization sold blue pumpkins to raise money for Lehner's family.

"The hands of the women who painted these pumpkins are literally blue from all the time they have spent on them," Officer Joseph Szafranski said. "They're selling out quickly."



**Stephanie Aquilina snaps a photo of her children Daniel, left, Courtney, center, and Matthew, right, with Hall of Famer Thurman Thomas after they bought a tee shirt to benefit the family of BPD officer Craig Lehner at the Great Pumpkin Farm in Clarence Saturday, October 21, 2017.**  
(Mark Mulville/Buffalo News)

Thurman Thomas was there, too. The former Buffalo Bills running back spent the afternoon in one of the attraction's barns, autographing T-shirts selling for \$10 each to benefit the family.

"I'm here just to support the Lehner family and raise some money," Thomas said. "I know a lot of police officers in my home town of Houston and where I went to school in Oklahoma, and here, too. This is all for someone who was important to his family and his community."

Earlier this month, Thomas expressed support for

National Football League players who kneel during the national anthem to protest police brutality. This was different, he said. Now he was among those who also felt they had to "be there."

"I'm showing love and support for the community like I always have," he said.

Former Sheriff Thomas F. Higgins helped organize the Police Department's Underwater Recovery Team back in 1960. He spent enough hours diving through ice holes to know the job. Last week he visited the officers on the river as they searched for Lehner.

"I was on that team for 15 years, and it all just grabbed me," Higgins said.

Lehner's death has gripped the community because it did not stem from the usual police dangers like a gunfight or ambush, Higgins said. He also believes the public appreciates the trauma that police divers routinely face and the bond that binds the police divers.

"This involved the camaraderie of the team and a long rescue operation," Higgins said. "It's so much different. And, he was down there alone and in the dark. It just rips you up."

Anthony M. Masiello knows the grief, too. He lost two police officers, two firefighters and a sanitation worker on the job during his 12 years as mayor of Buffalo.

"There is nothing more gut-wrenching than getting that call at 4 in the morning from ECMC," he said.

Masiello agreed that the funeral for Lehner on Wednesday may be unmatched in the city's history. Lehner's family has invited the public to the arena for the service.

He noted the quasi-military nature of the police and fire departments, their special bond, and the link that will draw officers from across the nation.

"This one played out over many days and in the minds of the public," Masiello said. "Everybody was in on this. And it's a painful reminder of how dangerous these jobs are.

## **Funeral Services Set For Buffalo Police Officer Who Died On Training Dive**

<http://www.democratandchronicle.com/story/news/2017/10/23/funeral-services-set-buffalo-cop-who-died-training-dive/791855001/>

Oct. 23, 2017 [Lauren Peace](#)

Funeral services have been set for Buffalo Police Officer Craig Lehner, who died during a training dive in the Niagara River earlier this month.

The Buffalo Police Department says calling hours for Lehner will be continue from 3 p.m. to 8 p.m. Tuesday at Lakeside Memorial Funeral Home in Hamburg, Erie County. Offsite parking is available at [St. Francis of Assisi Church and Woodlawn Beach](#).

His military and police funeral will be held at 10 a.m. Wednesday at KeyBank Center in downtown Buffalo. BPD said that it anticipates 5,000 law enforcement officers will attend. A procession, passing the department's current and future headquarters, will follow, ending at Forest Lawn Cemetery.

Buffalo Bills and Sabres owners Terry and Kim Pegula will pay for the funeral services.



"They've shown over and over again their commitment to the community and something like this is just a really good example of that," said John Hynes, a representative of KeyBank Center.

Lehner went missing Oct. 13. His body was recovered Oct. 17 by URT divers and sonar boats near Strawberry Island, a five-acre fish and wildlife preserve southeast of Grand Island.

Officials say the 34-year-old Lehner was participating in a training exercise Oct. 13 when he failed to resurface. His body wasn't found until Tuesday. An investigation into his death is underway.

At least 15 local, state, federal and Canadian agencies assisted in the search for his body, including 11 rescue divers from Rochester Police Department.

Lehner, who was described by friends as passionate about his work, was a nine-year Buffalo police veteran and a member of the department's K-9 unit for just more than a year. His dog, Shield, is expected to have a role in the funeral services.

He also served as an Army National Guard member.

Buffalo Police say all monetary donations for the Lehner family should be made to the Buffalo Police PBA at 74 Franklin St., Buffalo, NY 14202. Donations to the Buffalo Police K-9 Unit should be sent to the Buffalo PBA with a note on where the donation should go.

## **Buffalo Police Expect Up To 10,000 Officers At Officer Craig Lehner's Funeral**

<http://buffalonews.com/2017/10/23/live-coverage-buffalo-police-unveil-details-road-closures-parking-officer-craig-lehners-funeral/>

October 23, 2017 By [Aaron Besecker](#)

Buffalo police expect 5,000 to 10,000 law enforcement officers from across the United States and Canada to attend Officer Craig E. Lehner's funeral on Wednesday at the KeyBank Center, a Buffalo police official said Monday.

Lehner's K-9 dog, Shield, will follow the casket into the arena for what [could be the largest police funeral](#) ever held in Western New York. Members of the public are invited to the 10 a.m. service.

Lehner, 34, disappeared in the Niagara River shortly before 1 p.m. Oct. 13 during a training exercise for the Buffalo Police Department's Underwater Recovery Team. His body was recovered in the river Oct. 17. A nine-year veteran of the department, Lehner was a K-9 officer as well as a dive team member.

Police advised members of the public not planning on attending the funeral to avoid the arena area, if possible, from about 6 a.m. until the early afternoon. Members of the public attending the funeral are urged to take public transportation. Extra Metro Rail trains will be running on Wednesday morning.

Lt. Gov. Kathy Hochul is expected to attend Lehner's funeral service, Lt. Jeff Rinaldo said at a briefing at the KeyBank Center.

Before the service, there will be a limited procession of police and family from Lakeside Funeral Home in Hamburg to the arena. Police said they expect to release details about what route the procession would take to downtown Buffalo.

Buffalo police officers will gather on the plaza outside the arena before the service. Officers from other agencies will line up along Perry Street. The public must enter the arena near the Buffalo Sabres store on the Main Street side of the building. The security protocol in effect for the funeral will be the same as for Sabres games. The public will be seated in the 300 level.

The funeral service is expected to last about an hour.

After the service, there will be a procession from the downtown arena to Forest Lawn cemetery. The procession will leave the arena heading down Perry, north on Michigan Avenue, west on Scott Street to Upper Terrace to Franklin Street, past Buffalo police headquarters, to Niagara Street, around Niagara Square and up Delaware Avenue. There will be intermittent closures of Delaware through the morning, as well as a complete closure of Delaware during the procession.

The procession is expected to leave the area around KeyBank Center at about 11 a.m. or 11:30 a.m.

Streets around the arena will be closed, including Main, Washington, Perry and Scott streets, as well as Erie Avenue into Erie Basin Marina. Ohio Street, between Ganson Street and Michigan, will be closed and used for a staging area and parking. Two streets near the cemetery will be closed – Main Street between Canisius College and Delavan Avenue, and West Delavan between Delaware and Main. They will be closed by about 9 a.m.

The Skyway will remain open for traffic throughout the morning, Rinaldo said.



Members of the public who want to view the procession will have accessible vantage points along Delaware Avenue between Niagara Square and West Delavan Avenue, police said.

Police [aren't sure exactly what happened](#) that caused Lehner to go missing during the training exercise. Police sources said Lehner was attached to a tender cable in about 25 feet of water when he suddenly stopped moving.

## **Allegany Firefighters 'Humbled' To Aid In Search For Buffalo Police Diver**

[http://www.oleantimesherald.com/news/allegany-firefighters-humbled-to-aid-in-search-for-buffalo-police/article\\_2e7e2d5a-b870-11e7-904c-1be21de35d4d.html](http://www.oleantimesherald.com/news/allegany-firefighters-humbled-to-aid-in-search-for-buffalo-police/article_2e7e2d5a-b870-11e7-904c-1be21de35d4d.html)

10-24-2017 By TOM DINKI, Olean Times Herald

### **Body of Craig Lehner found in Niagara River after five-day search**

ALLEGANY — Robby Jones described he and other Allegany firefighters' experience assisting in the search for Buffalo police officer Craig Lehner last week as "quiet."

Jones and three other members of the Allegany Volunteer Fire Department's Technical Rescue Team traveled up to Buffalo Oct. 16 to join the approximately 15 other agencies who helped search for Lehner, a member of the Buffalo Police Department's Underwater Recovery Team who went missing during an Oct. 13 training exercise in the Niagara River. By that time, crews knew the operation was no longer a rescue mission, but a recovery mission.

"It was very quiet because everybody knew what they were looking for as far as a fellow law enforcement officer," said Jones, the department's third assistant chief and head of its Technical Rescue Team. "You could tell by being there that everybody just wanted to find him. ... It was definitely a different kind of atmosphere."

The body of Lehner, 34, was found in the river the next day — Oct. 17 — and will be put to rest after a funeral that will be open to the public and held at KeyBank Center in downtown Buffalo Wednesday morning.

Jones said the opportunity to assist in the search for a fellow first responder was "humbling" for himself and his team members Tony Papasergi, Tim Hite and Jeff Morgan.

"It was just an honor to be asked to go," he said.

Allegany firefighters were originally contacted by Cattaraugus County Emergency Services Director Chris Baker. Jones said Baker had been contacted by the New York State Office of Fire Prevention and Control, which was looking for local agencies that may be equipped to aid in the search. The Allegany Volunteer Fire Department is the only department in Cattaraugus County with side-scan sonar equipment.

The firefighters launched their boat into the Niagara River at 7 a.m. and didn't come ashore for the day until 5:30 p.m. The side-scan sonar equipment, which was attached to the team's boat, searched the bed of the river in grid patterns that had yet to be checked.

"We didn't find anything ourselves, but there were several other boats and divers there that also were looking," Jones said. "We don't have the biggest boat as the guys up there do, but we were more than happy to be there."



**Robby Jones (from left), head of the Allegany Volunteer Fire Department's Technical Rescue Team, team members Tony Papasergi, Tim Hite and Jeff Morgan, and Cattaraugus County Emergency Services Director Chris Baker stand in the fire hall. Jones, Papasergi, Hite and Morgan traveled to Buffalo Oct. 16 to assist in the search for missing Buffalo police diver Craig Lehner.  
Courtesy of Allegany Volunteer Fire Department**

Back in Allegany the next day, the four Technical Rescue Team members learned that Lehner had been found floating in the water in an area near Strawberry Island.

"As soon as the news came out, we all just kind of messaged each other," Jones said. "It's a huge relief that he was found because we were really concerned because the water is very, very swift moving, and we knew it was going to be a very tough time."

There are 14 members of the Technical Rescue Team, who are trained in water, rope, machine and wild land rescue. They purchased the side-scan sonar equipment about a year and a half ago.

"It's definitely a huge bonus to our county and the area counties around us that we have this type of equipment," Jones said. "It's just great that a small town volunteer fire department was asked to participate with these big organizations as far as (the Buffalo police and fire departments)."

## **Friend's Facebook tribute for Officer Craig Lehner goes viral**

[http://buffalonews.com/2017/10/24/portraits-buffalo-police-officer/?utm\\_medium=more\\_stories](http://buffalonews.com/2017/10/24/portraits-buffalo-police-officer/?utm_medium=more_stories)  
*October 24, 2017* By Maki Becker

Selfies. Goofing with friends. Jumping out of an airplane. Posing with fellow National Guard soldiers.

This is how Buffalo Police Officer Craig Lehner, who died Oct. 13 in a training accident in the Niagara River, is remembered by a friend.

Heather Adamczak, who went to Akron High School with Lehner and stayed friends with him, edited together a video of photos of him that she posted Friday on Facebook. By Tuesday, it had been viewed 147,000 times and shared nearly 3,000 times.

<https://www.facebook.com/heather.adamczak/videos/10215624052620577/>

"He was a great man that loved his job and his co-workers. They were like his family," Adamczak said. "His partner Shield was the best part of his life. He was moving from the city to a bigger house for Shield and couldn't wait to have a yard for him. He was funny and loved to joke around.

"He took his job very seriously, and it was a dream come true for him to become a K-9 Officer."

Lehner's funeral is scheduled for 10 a.m. Wednesday at the KeyBank Center in Buffalo. Up to 10,000 law enforcement officers from across the United States and Canada are expected to attend, [a Buffalo police official said Monday](#).

Lehner's K-9 dog, Shield, will follow the casket into the arena for what [could be the largest police funeral](#) ever held in Western New York. Members of the public are invited to the 10 a.m. service; those not planning to attend are advised to avoid the area surrounding the arena, if possible, from 6 a.m. until the early afternoon. Extra Metro Rail trains will be running on Wednesday morning.

The funeral service is expected to last about an hour.

After the service, there will be a procession from the downtown arena to Forest Lawn cemetery. The procession will leave the arena heading down Perry, north on

Michigan Avenue, west on Scott Street to Upper Terrace to Franklin Street, past Buffalo police headquarters, to Niagara Street, around Niagara Square and up Delaware Avenue. There will be intermittent closures of Delaware through the morning, as well as a complete closure of Delaware during the procession.

The procession is expected to leave the area around KeyBank Center at about 11 a.m. or 11:30 a.m.

Streets around the arena will be closed, including Main, Washington, Perry and Scott streets, as well as Erie Avenue into Erie Basin Marina. Ohio Street, between Ganson Street and Michigan, will be closed and used for a staging area and parking.

Two streets near the cemetery will be closed – Main Street between Canisius College and Delavan Avenue, and West Delavan between Delaware and Main. They will be closed by about 9 a.m.

## **Craig Lehner's Patrol Partner: 'I Refuse To Say Goodbye'**

<http://buffalonews.com/2017/10/25/craig-lehners-partner-refuse-say-goodbye/>

October 25, 2017 By *Maki Becker*

For nearly a decade, Officer Tommy Champion was Craig Lehner's patrol partner in the Buffalo Police Department.

They were also the best of friends who shared the same passions – music, working out and muscle cars – and a devotion to their job.

"Together Craig and I worked meticulously, with an emphasis on diplomacy and respect while also being extremely productive and active," Champion said Wednesday in eulogizing his partner. "But we always took care of business when we had to."



**Officer Craig Lehner**

Standing before a crowd of thousands at [Lehner's funeral](#) Wednesday in KeyBank Center, Champion spoke with poise and raw emotion about his friend and partner who died in a police dive team training accident in the Niagara River.

He shared his admiration for Lehner's devotion to the police department and the New York Army National Guard, as well as his embrace of living life to the fullest. Then there was the matter of Lehner's movie star good looks that would prompt his friends to call him "Bradley Cooper."

Champion recalled the day when they were still rookies and Lehner walked over to him in his patrol car.



"Hey, bro. You want to ride together?" Lehner asked Champion.



**Tommy Champion, Buffalo Police officer and partner of Craig E. Lehner speaks at the funeral for Buffalo Police officer Craig E. Lehner at the KeyBank Center on Wednesday, Oct. 25, 2017.  
(Harry Scull Jr./ Buffalo News)**

"Little did I know that would be the beginning of a bond and a journey together that would transcend this life itself," Champion said.

From the time they were in the police academy, Champion said, Lehner showed the kind of man he was. Although he had a hernia there, Lehner never let it get in his way of his training.

"I knew that he was in pain yet here [he] was," Champion said. "This guy was doing more reps than most people there despite being hurt. That was the sort of toughness that I could come to expect from him all the time."

Champion shared stories of how Lehner interacted with the public – testaments to the kind of police officer and human being he was.

He recounted the time, early on in their career, when Champion was handling a landlord/tenant dispute – the kind of thankless call police deal with all the time – and Lehner pulled up in a Crown Victoria patrol car to back him up.

Champion remembered being struck by how Lehner conducted himself.

"He listened to the complainant's issue and began to advise them. Practically. Efficiently. Respectfully," Champion, who is African-American, said of his white partner who grew up in rural Akron.

"This was important to me as I grew up in that community and was a product of the inner city," said Champion. "I said to myself, 'Wow, this guy is sharp.' I was surprised and almost vexed at how good, how capable he was and how well he treated people."

There was also the goofy, fun-loving side of Lehner.

When they would pull in their patrol car next to a driver who was rocking out and singing along to music, Lehner would start dancing and Champion would join him.

"The drivers always burst out laughing hysterically and start cheering him on with their hands up as we drove off to our 911 call," Champion said. "That was the humor, beauty and brilliance of my partner. What a unique soul."

Speaking to the thousands of law enforcement and military personnel who turned out at the funeral, Champion seemed to address current tensions about police and race.

"Do not be dismayed," Champion said. "... Although sometimes it feels the world no longer respects the sacrifices that we make, scrutinizes us and treats our patriotism and dedication as an anachronism, a relic belonging in the past, we shall not yield.

We shall not falter," Champion said. "We will continue working toward a better tomorrow carrying out the oaths that we all solemnly vowed to. This is who we are and this world needs us."

In closing his 12-minute eulogy, Champion said he looked forward to seeing Lehner again one day.

"I refuse to say goodbye," he said. "Look around you. His vast presence is still here with us. I know I will see him again one day.... Love you, Craig."

The mourners gave him a standing ovation.

## **A Somber Farewell To Buffalo Police Officer Craig Lehner**

<http://buffalonews.com/2017/10/25/live-coverage-buffalo-police-officer-craig-lehners-funeral/>

October 26, 2017 By Staff

The night his body was pulled from the Niagara River, Buffalo police Officer Craig E. Lehner had planned to attend a gathering he organized to memorialize one of his best friends, Army National Guard Spec. Michael "Mikey" Williams.



**Mourners watch the funeral procession for Buffalo police Officer Craig E. Lehner move down Delaware Avenue toward Forest Lawn cemetery on Wednesday, Oct. 25, 2017. (Mark Sommer/ Buffalo News)**



**An officer pets Shield as he files into the KeyBank Center for Officer Craig Lehner's funeral service on Oct. 25, 2017. (Mark Mulville/Buffalo News)**

Williams had died 14 years earlier, killed by a roadside bomb in Iraq on that same date, Oct. 17.

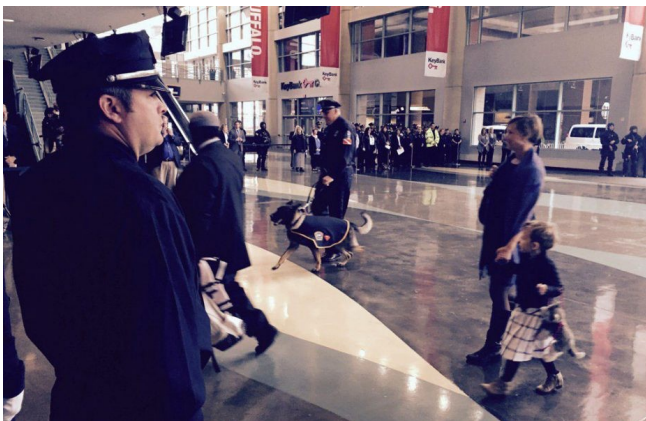
Williams, who was Lehner's mentor in the Guard, had been deployed to Iraq in 2003 because Lehner was too sick at the time to go to Iraq, recalled his Guard commander, Major Mark Sorrentino, as he eulogized Lehner Wednesday in front of thousands of police officers and other mourners at Lehner's funeral service at the KeyBank Center in Buffalo.

"...We all felt that Mikey was going to help bring Craig home to us on the 17<sup>th</sup>," Sorrentino said of the five-day search in the swift currents of the Niagara River for Lehner's body.

The flag-draped casket carrying the body of Lehner, 34, who died in a police dive team training exercise, was saluted by thousands of police officers from across North America during its final journey Wednesday, as a Harley Davidson motorcycle hearse carried him to the KeyBank Center for one of the largest funerals in Western New York history.

The casket and relatives of the officer arrived outside the arena at 10:30 a.m., escorted by police and the Patriot Guard riders from New York, Pennsylvania and Syracuse on 11 motorcycles and in dozens of police cruisers.

Thousands of law enforcement officers lined up 20 rows deep on both sides of Perry Street, from Washington Street to Michigan Avenue, to pay tribute to Lehner, 34, a 9-year veteran of the police department.



**Craig Lehner's K-9 partner, Shield, arrives at KeyBank Center behind Lehner's casket. He's led by Officer John Kujawa. (Bob McCarthy/Buffalo News)**

Police estimated 8,000 people, including officers from across the U.S. and Canada, were at the service in the arena, where the crowds are usually cheering for the Buffalo Sabres, not mourning a fallen hero.

Lehner's K-9 dog, Shield, who Lehner named after Officer James A. Shields, who died in a 2002 auto accident while on duty, rode to the arena in a police SUV right behind the hearse, followed the casket into the arena, led by Officer John Kujawa.





**field says goodbye to his master and friend Buffalo Police officer Craig Lehner at Forest Lawn in Buffalo on Wednesday, Oct. 25, 2017. (James P. McCoy / Buffalo News)**

The sounds of other police K-9s barking could be heard.

The Greater Buffalo Firefighters Pipe and Drum Band played "Going Home" as Lehner's mother and siblings were escorted to their seats in the arena. The service was scheduled to begin at 10 a.m., but there were so many officers filing into the arena that it did not begin until 11:14 a.m. Doug Allen, who sings the national anthem at Buffalo Sabres home games, began the service by singing the "Star Spangled Banner."

"We are here to celebrate the life of an American hero," said Buffalo police Chief of Detectives Dennis Richards. He thanked Kathy Lehner, who was burying her third son Wednesday, for giving Lehner to the world. "Craig's name will soon be



**Buffalo police Officer Craig Lehner, who vanished during a police diving unit training exercise on Friday, Oct. 13, 2017, in the Niagara River. Lehner's body was recovered Tuesday, Oct. 17 by authorities. (Courtesy of Shannon Davis)**



engraved on the wall of the National Law Enforcement Memorial in Washington DC., forever remembered as paying the ultimate price in service to his profession."



**Craig Lehner's casket was taken from the Lakeside Memorial Funeral Home in Hamburg to KeyBank Center in a Harley-Davidson motorcycle hearse.**  
*Sharon Cantillon/Buffalo News*

A flock of doves were released as the graveside ceremony ended just after 2:30 p.m.

About 15 minutes later, as the crowd thinned, Shield approached the grave and put his paws on the casket.

The Buffalo News has more than a dozen reporters and five photographers providing live coverage of the funeral, the [flag-waving Buffalonians](#) lining the



**Patriot Guard Riders flags frame the Lakeside Memorial Funeral home in Hamburg where Officer Craig Lehner's body is on Wednesday, Oct. 25, 2017. (Sharon Cantillon/Buffalo News)**

route of the funeral procession from the arena to Forest Lawn cemetery, and at the graveside services there.

Shield lay on the ground near the casket in front of the stage in the arena as the eulogies were delivered.



**The casket containing Officer Craig E. Lehner is carried inside the KeyBank Center in Buffalo, N.Y. on Oct. 25, 2017.**

every day.

Leo McGrath, the Buffalo police dive team commander who spotted Lehner's body in the river, said the Lehner's nickname was "Superman." "He had a superman physique as well as two full sleeves of tattoos," McGrath said.

### **Officer Craig Lehner is laid to rest**

"He was always calm, cool and collected. He had so much confidence you would have thought he was on the (dive) team for years. "

Sorrentino, the Army National Guard major, said soldiers in Lehner's unit also called him Superman.

Commissioner Daniel Derenda said Lehner's dog was taken to every Buffalo police office in the past week to comfort Lehner's fellow officers.

"He brought both smiles and tears to the faces of the officers he encountered. When you see Shield, you can't help think of Craig," Derenda said. He said his own 12-year-old daughter was among the dozens who wanted to adopt Shield after Lehner's body was recovered Oct. 17 from the Niagara River.

"K-9 43, rest in peace," Derenda concluded, mentioning Lehner's radio call sign.

Mayor Byron Brown also celebrated Lehner's life at the funeral service.

"We gather here today under the worst circumstances, in a collective state of profound and overwhelming sadness and loss," Brown said.

He said Lehner was the truest example of the selfless bravery that uniformed officers are called upon to demonstrate





**K-9 handlers from across the region stood in formation on the curb to salute their fallen brother as the funeral procession for Craig Lehner passed by on the way to the funeral at KeyBank Center. *Robert Kirkham/Buffalo News***

"They believed in him, believed he could fly," Sorrentino said from the stage of the arena.



**Law enforcement officers line Perry Street while preparing to welcome the funeral procession for fallen Buffalo Police Officer Craig Lehner outside KeyBank Center, Wednesday, Oct. 25, 2017. (*Derek Gee/Buffalo News*)**

## What happened to Officer Lehner underneath the Niagara River?

<http://buffalonews.com/2017/10/28/what-happened-to-officer-lehner-underneath-the-niagara-river/>

October 28, 2017 By [Lou Michel](#) and Maki Becker Updated October 29, 2017

*In the days since Buffalo Police Officer Craig Lehner's body was recovered from the Niagara River and the city mourned his death at a funeral attended by thousands, the mystery of what happened to him remains.*

*Two investigations are underway, one by Buffalo homicide detectives and one by the state Labor Department.*

Some details are coming to light.

- A preliminary autopsy indicated Lehner, 34, died as the result of drowning, police officials told The Buffalo News. Water was found in his lungs.



**Law enforcement officials searched the Niagara River for five days for the body of Officer Craig Lehner after he went missing under water during a training exercise on Oct. 13. (Sharon Cantillon/Buffalo News)**

- There was a gash on his forehead and trauma to his head, police said.
- Lehner's air tanks, which were on him when his body was found, were more than half full.
- Several inches of a tender line were connected to a harness ring on Lehner's suit. The end of the line was frayed, and did not appear to have been cleanly cut.

"It was a tragic accident," said Buffalo Police Commissioner Daniel Derenda, "and the investigation is still in its preliminary stages."

As the investigations continue, Buffalo's Underwater Recovery Team is not planning any more dives in the Niagara River for the rest of the year, police officials said, but the team will conduct other training.

And so far, there are no indications of equipment failure in connection to Lehner's death, police said.

### **Air In The Tanks, A Frayed Tether**

Lehner's body was found floating in the river a few thousand feet north of the International Railway Bridge on Oct. 17 and he was still wearing much of his gear, according to police: his air tanks, a regulator, a buoyancy compensator and a 40-pound weight belt. His face mask was missing.



Lehner's tanks were more than half-full of air, about 1,600 psi (pounds per square inch), police said. Diving experts consulted by The News say that would provide as much as about an hour of air, depending on the diver's exertion levels.

Divers are trained to ditch their weights and inflate the buoyancy compensator, a vest designed to fill up with air, if they need to get to the surface, experts said.

When Lehner jumped into the water off Bird Island Pier, which is about 25 or 30 feet deep at that location, a fellow member of the police Underwater Recovery Team was holding the tender line, which is standard practice for dives of this nature, police said.

Lehner was in the water for less than five minutes when the team member holding his line noticed it suddenly tightened. The line then went slack, and then tightened again, according to new details obtained by The News.

His team members feared he was trapped, possibly tangled in old fishing lines or debris.

A rescue effort followed, starting at about 12:50 p.m. Oct. 13. Two URT divers tried to follow the tender line down to where he was but the current was too strong and they could not locate him, police sources described to The News.

Team members next threaded an emergency air tank to the tender line and attempted to send it down to Lehner, but again the current proved too much and the tank would not sink to the river bottom. It was later found floating near the pier.

They called for assistance, and the U.S. Coast Guard dispatched a 45-foot response boat that arrived at approximately 1:10 p.m., according to the Coast Guard.

With the tender cable extended to its full length, 300 feet, and attached to the boat, the Coast Guard crew pulled from different directions, hoping to un snag the line. A police diver went down on the line from the boat. But the line snapped, the police sources said.

The frayed end of the line still attached to Lehner likely means it tore or snapped and wasn't cut, police and diving experts told The News.

Lehner had with him two knives and a pair of surgical scissors, which he could have used to cut the line to try to free himself, a Buffalo Police Underwater Recovery Team member told The News. The scissors are so sharp they can cut through a penny, according to the officer who spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the case.



**Officer Craig Lehner**

## Diving in the Niagara River

Lehner, a nine-year-veteran of the Buffalo Police Department, joined the department's Underwater Recovery Team in April. Before joining the team, prospective members need to be certified scuba divers. Once accepted, members train for a year before becoming a permanent member. Lehner was still going through the year of training. Among the milestones he still needed to experience for his training were winter diving under ice, a fellow team member said.

Lehner's commander on the team, Detective Leo McGrath, described him at his funeral as "calm, cool, collected" and adept at finding objects in the water, "even in black water."

The 14-member diving team trained in the Niagara River once a month, police said.

On Oct. 13, before the dive team members went into the water, McGrath told mourners last week, he asked the same question he always does before training sessions.

"What is the most important thing to concentrate on today?" he asked. Before he could even finish the question, Lehner had yelled out: "Safety!"

"I had to tell him to be patient, 'Wait for me to get my sentence out,'" McGrath said Wednesday. "But that's how eager he was to get to work."

Diving in moving water, particularly swift water like the Niagara River, comes with obvious risks and the Buffalo police diving team is well aware of the potential hazards, police said.

Lehner posted a couple of quick videos about diving to his Snapchat account that appear to have been taken just before his dive on Oct. 13. Snapchat posts are designed to disappear after 24 hours.

In one, the river is rushing and the Peace Bridge is in the background. Three divers are standing on a rock next to the water and a railing can be seen on the right.



**The search for Buffalo Police Officer Craig Lehner, who disappeared during scuba diving training on Oct. 13, went on in the fast-moving, debris-filled waters of the Niagara River for five days. Here, the Monroe County Sheriff's Department helped in the search.**  
(Sharon Cantillon/Buffalo News)

"That water is MOVING," Lehner wrote.

A second video shows Lehner's feet in diving shoes and then he turns the camera on himself and he makes a wry joke.

Divers say the current is powerful at the start of the Niagara River and the bottom is littered with debris. On Oct. 13, police estimated the water was moving at about 10 to 15 miles per hour. Visibility at the bottom would be 3 to 4 feet.

### **One Diver's Experience**

James Kinner, a local scuba diver and fisherman, dives recreationally in the Niagara River and once dove off the Bird Island Pier, the area where the police divers were practicing Oct. 13. Once was enough, he said of his experience 15 years ago.

"The current is the strongest I've ever experienced, treacherous," he described in emails to The News. "There is all kinds of junk down there, lots of fishing line. The bottom is uneven."

During that dive 15 years ago, Kinner and two other divers with him that day weren't tethered. They used a claw, similar to a gardening claw, to hook onto the bottom to control their movement.

He recalled that the diver who led the expedition taught them to go downstream backward. By facing the current, Kinner said the leader explained, "it would keep the mask and regulator from being torn from our face, or free flowing, and keep the flow from flipping us over. The current would actually get under you and flip you." Kinner regretted the dive as soon as he got in the water, he said.

"The current tore at me as I worked down the rocks ... The current pushed the glass of the mask onto my nose. You could only turn your head a bit or it would be torn off. Junk was everywhere," he described in a Facebook post.

Using his claw and fighting the current, he said he made his way downstream taking quick peeks underneath to make sure he wasn't going to crash into anything. "It was sort of like climbing down a mountain," he said, "with a fire hose hitting you."

A rock that he tried to hold onto turned over and he free floated for a few seconds before he reached his claw out to hook onto an old railing.

"In those few seconds, I had gained some speed. I thought it was going to tear my arm out of the socket," Kinner described. He made his way out of the water, and he and another diver agreed they'd never do it again.

"One and done," Kinner said.

### **Other Police Diving Accidents**

The Buffalo Police Department is not alone in having lost one of its own in a diving accident.

In 1984, Rochester Police Officer Ronald J. Siver died while searching for the victim of a boat crash in Irondequoit Bay. His widow sued the City of Rochester for negligence, claiming "improper training procedures" and "faulty equipment led to her husband's death," according to the Rochester Democrat and Chronicle. She received a settlement of more than \$1 million but the city did not admit negligence, the paper reported. The Rochester Police Department sent its diving team to help in the search and recovery of Officer Lehner.

In 2000, Chicago Police Sgt. Alane Stoffregen drowned during a training exercise a mile off the shore of Lake Michigan.

"Rough waters, exhaustion and panic contributed to the drowning," the Chicago Tribune reported.

In late 2011, Officer Specialist Timothy Schock of the Chesapeake, Va., Police Department drowned in a training exercise in a lake after two pieces of his equipment failed, according to the Virginian-Pilot.

Lehner's death has resonated far beyond Western New York.

"Every time there is a loss in the public safety diving community, we feel it. It is a difficult thing when it happens and we all want to find answers to make it not happen again," said Justin Fox, president of Dive Rescue International Inc., in Fort Collins, Colo. The organization provides training and equipment for responders in aquatic environments.

He pointed out that all scuba diving comes with risks.

"And when you're diving in moving water, it is more of a risk, and when it is fast moving water, it is an even greater risk," Fox said.

## **Questions Posed About Dive Training**

During the search and following the recovery, many questions have been asked about police diving procedures.

Among them:

- Why couldn't searchers communicate with Lehner?
- Why didn't searchers use GPS to find Lehner?
- Aren't divers supposed to work in teams of two?
- Would it have helped if the police had a boat in the water?



Blades Robinson, executive director of the International Association of Dive Rescue Specialists, who is not involved in the investigation and did not want to guess about what happened, offered some general answers.

**Communication:** Divers should be able to communicate with their surface tenders, the person who is holding their tether line during a dive. Some divers use line signals by pulling on the line. Electronic voice communication is preferred, Robinson said.

The Buffalo Police Department has eight "comm units" for its diving team – full helmets with two-way radio communication. Lehner was not wearing one of those.

He had on a regulator and face mask. A Buffalo police diver said the helmet would not work in the Niagara River because it would be "ripped off" by the current.

**GPS:** Global Positioning Systems don't work under water. Scuba divers often carry beacons or whistles, but they only work at the surface.

**Teams of two:** Recreational divers are advised to always swim in pairs but public safety divers often do not because they usually work while tethered to a surface tender.

"The diver can remain focused on doing the task at hand without the distraction of monitoring the buddy underwater," Robinson said.

There was a second diver in the water at the time Lehner ran into trouble, although they weren't working as a team, police officials said. That diver was unaware at the time that a problem had occurred.

**Boat:** "In some instances, it may be appropriate but in many instances it may not be appropriate. This is a judgment call based on conditions at a given time/location," Robinson said.

## **What Killed Buffalo Police Diver Craig Lehner Under Niagara River? (Report)**

[http://www.newyorkupstate.com/buffalo/2017/10/what\\_killed\\_buffalo\\_police\\_diver\\_craig\\_lehner\\_under\\_niagara\\_river1.html](http://www.newyorkupstate.com/buffalo/2017/10/what_killed_buffalo_police_diver_craig_lehner_under_niagara_river1.html)  
October 30, 2017 [By Ben Axelson | baxelson@nyup.com](#)

It's been nearly two weeks since Buffalo Police Officer Craig Lehner's [body was recovered](#) after a tragic dive training accident in the Niagara River, and answers to some of the biggest questions about his death are starting to come to light.



**Photo: Matthew Digati**



Lehner was diving with other officers off of Bird Island Pier on Friday, October 13 when he [went missing beneath the rushing currents](#) of the river.

Two investigations underway by Buffalo homicide detectives and the New York State Labor Department have revealed some details about what happened, the [Buffalo News Reported](#).

## Cause Of Death

A preliminary autopsy has revealed that Lehner died from drowning. Water was found in his lungs.

Buffalo Police Commissioner Daniel Darena called it "a tragic accident," but what went wrong to cause Lehner to drown in what was intended to be a controlled police training exercise?

## Injuries

Lehner had a gash on his forehead and other trauma to his head, according to the autopsy.

## Air

An air tank malfunction was not considered a factor in Lehner's death. Police told the News that Lehner's air tanks were still more than half full when they found his body. That meant he had at least an hour of unused air remaining in his tanks.

## The tender line

According to the News, the team member holding Lehner's tender line felt it suddenly tighten, then go slack, then tighten again less than five minutes after Lehner went into the water.

Coast Guard crews attempted to pull on the line from different directions, in case the line had become snagged on debris, but were unable to dislodge it. A diver tried to traverse the line into the water, but it snapped.



**Nalina Shapiro** ✓  
@nalinashapiro4



A page from officer #craiglehner funeral program  
@news4buffalo

10:03 AM - Oct 25, 2017 · Buffalo, NY



Lehner had shears and knives on his person capable of severing the line, but the end still attached to his body appeared frayed, meaning it was more likely to have snapped or torn than to have been cut.



### **DEATH IN THE LINE OF DUTY: Police and firefighters who died in NY State last year**

These [brave men and women gave their lives](#) in the service of the citizens of New York State.

#### **Dangerous waters**

The location of the diving exercise is a notably hazardous location on the river. Team members worried that Lehner may have been trapped in old fishing lines or debris at the bottom.

Local diver James Kinner, who had ventured into that part of the Niagara River before, told the Buffalo News he would not do so again due to the uneven riverbed and perilous current.

"The current is the strongest I've ever experienced, treacherous," he said. "There is all kinds of junk down there, lots of fishing line. The bottom is uneven."

#### **Other gear**

Equipment malfunction is not considered to be a factor in Lehner's death. According to the News, he was wearing most of his gear, including air tanks, a regulator, a buoyancy compensator and a 40-pound weight belt.

His face mask, however, was missing. Kinner told the News that when he dove off Bird Island, he remembered feeling the pressure of the current so intensely against his mask, he knew if he turned his face just slightly, it could be torn right off.

#### **Why couldn't searchers communicate with Lehner?**

According to the Buffalo Police, standard dive team "comm unit" masks could not be used in the hazardous Niagara River because they are too bulky and would be ripped off divers' faces.

#### **Why didn't searchers use GPS to find Lehner?**

GPS systems don't work underwater, and other location methods like whistles and beacons only work above the surface.

#### **Why weren't the divers working in teams of two?**



There was another diver in the water at the same time as Lehner, but the two were not working as a team, according to The News.

### **Moving forward**

Thousands of people, including police officers from across the United States, turned out to [mourn Lehner's death](#) at the Keybank Center in Downtown Buffalo on Wednesday.

The investigation into his death is ongoing. In the meantime, Buffalo's Underwater Recovery Team says it will not conduct any more training dives in the river for the rest of the year.

## **Family Of Officer Craig Lehner Files Notice Of Claim Against City, Police Department**

<http://www.wivb.com/news/local-news/family-of-officer-craig-lehner-files-notice-of-claim-against-city-police-department/1083185904>

Jan 26, 2018 **By:** Kaley Lynch. News 4 Digital Producer

**BUFFALO, N.Y. (WIVB) -** Sources tell News 4 the family of Craig Lehner earlier this week filed a claim against the city for wrongful death.

The filing is not a lawsuit -- but it's the first step to eventually suing the city and the police department over the former dive team member's death in the Niagara River last fall.

Lehner and other members of the Buffalo Police dive team were conducting a training exercise in the Niagara River on Oct. 13.

Lehner dove into about 25 feet of water alone, with his fellow members connected to him via a tether on shore.

Within minutes, the tether suddenly tightened and snagged on something far below the surface.

The five-day search that followed involved dozens of first responders from agencies across the state and Canada.

Lehner's body was found near Strawberry Island on the final day. The Buffalo Police homicide unit and the Public Employee Health and Safety bureau are continuing to investigate.

It could be several more weeks before the department's internal investigation is released to the public.

In the state of New York, notice of claims must be filed within a reasonable time after the incident -- typically between three and six months.

Sources tell News 4 the notice of claim names both the police department and the city of Buffalo.

## Legal Filing In Death Of Bpd Officer Craig Lehner

<http://www.wben.com/articles/legal-filing-death-bpd-officer-craig-lehner>

JANUARY 26, 2018

### 'Notice of claim' is first step in expected legal action

Buffalo, N.Y. (WBEN) - Criminal defense attorney and WBEN legal analyst Paul Cambria is not surprised that the family of fallen Buffalo Police diver Craig Lehner has filed a 'notice of claim' against the City of Buffalo and Buffalo Police Department. WBEN has confirmed the filing with the city. Lehner died during an underwater recovery training mission in the Niagara River in October after he went missing and his remains were located days later.

Cambria tells WBEN the legal filing is the first step in a likely lawsuit to be filed and needed to be on the record within ninety days of the incident.

"When you sue a municipality as opposed to a private individual or company, you have to file a notice of claim first", Cambria said.

Cambria says the filing makes way for a formal lawsuit which could be filed within three years of the incident.

As for the grounds for an expected lawsuit, Cambria says, "they may take the position that there was negligence involved in the rescue".

Lehner was 34 years old and was a nine year veteran of the Buffalo Police Department, serving in the K-9 and Underwater Recovery units.

Lehner's death is being investigated by the Buffalo Police Homicide unit.

## **AUDIO: Legal Analyst Paul Cambria**

### **Paul Cambria On Lehner Family Notice Of Claim**

<http://www.wben.com/media/audio-channel/paul-cambria-lehner-family-notice-claim>

**Transcript - Not for consumer use. Robot overlords only. Will not be accurate.**

When mutual municipality. As opposed to a private individual work. Have to file note the plane for you have to file that was in nine days of the time which you claim your actions occur. So that's a prerequisite watch while that they have a so called fifty cheering which is credibility. Order hearing as to what he should worry about. What are you explain right after you filed notice line you can file your actual losses. So that's why they filed that year isn't surprising or expected. I I thought so or number of people who. Talk about. Why for example. The police. Recovery individuals. And simply follow that other why now. In the off. All these two maneuvering the boats and breaking that tether line. So. You know these conversations. Or at among. Order sounds so I wasn't prized year. That other files

laws. Now what grounds do leaders in hand it is that it may take the position that negligence and ball in the rescue. And it you know it could take the war ma. What I got ours oh want to follow up lied to argue. So that would be my Aspen the negligence. And what is the time frame that they have defied they're Butler don't. I'm in day out at the all wouldn't use statute. That could be anywhere up to years.

So at what it. Now after since they have filed the sue what happens next. While watts or files suit it'll take the usual course there will be an answer around our city and then there'll be pre trial and that should. And eventually at trial. And then what the city be prepared to handle that type of claim. Well the city may do about that may have insurance coverage and church orders a takeover. Or the city may do it themselves or could be out.

## Officer Lehner's Family Files Claim Against Police And City

<http://www.wivb.com/news/local-news/officer-lehners-family-files-claim-against-police-and-city/1083072856>

Jan 26, 2018 **By:** Kaley Lynch. News 4 Digital Producer News 4 Staff

### VIDEO:



## Press Pass: Questions Linger Around Lehner's Death

[HTTP://NEWS.WBFO.ORG/POST/PRESS-PASS-QUESTIONS-LINGER-AROUND-LEHNER'S-DEATH](http://NEWS.WBFO.ORG/POST/PRESS-PASS-QUESTIONS-LINGER-AROUND-LEHNER'S-DEATH)

MAR 13, 2018 By JAY MORAN •

Investigations are underway into the death of Buffalo Police officer Craig Lehner, who lost his life during a training exercise with the Underwater Recovery Team.

Using Freedom of Information requests to gain access to department records, Daniela Porat of Investigative Post has raised [concerns about the officer's death](#) in

the Niagara River. Porat discussed the story during her appearance on WBFO's Press Pass.

**Listen:**

[https://cpa.ds.npr.org/wbfo/audio/2018/03/press\\_pass\\_03.09.18\\_mixdown\\_1.mp3](https://cpa.ds.npr.org/wbfo/audio/2018/03/press_pass_03.09.18_mixdown_1.mp3)  
4:35 *Daniela Porat of Investigative Post discusses her recent story during WBFO's Press Pass.*

## What killed Craig Lehner? Sister blames 'defective' equipment, lack of training

<http://buffalonews.com/2018/02/14/craig-lehners-sister-says-dive-training-exercise-was-too-dangerous-equipment-was-defective/>

February 14, 2018 |By Maki Becker and Lou Michel and Dale Anderson\_Updated February 15, 2018

The sister of Craig Lehner, the Buffalo police officer who [died during a dive training accident](#) in the Niagara River in October, says the Buffalo Police Department should not have allowed the training exercise to take place because it was too dangerous, that her brother had not been properly trained before going into the water and that his diving equipment was "in dangerous, unsafe and/or defective condition," according to court papers she filed late last month.

Lehner, a K-9 officer who joined the Buffalo Police Underwater Recovery Team six months before his death, had just jumped into the water for a training exercise in the fast-moving waters of the Niagara River when he ran into trouble. A frantic recovery effort followed as law enforcement officers and first responders from around the region came to assist. On the fifth day of searching, Lehner's body was recovered about two miles downstream.

Lehner's sister, [Donna Wilson](#), filed a notice of claim, the first step in a lawsuit, against the City of Buffalo and the Buffalo Police Department on Jan. 25. In it, she says the training accident "was caused by the reason of negligence, recklessness and carelessness" of the city and police department.

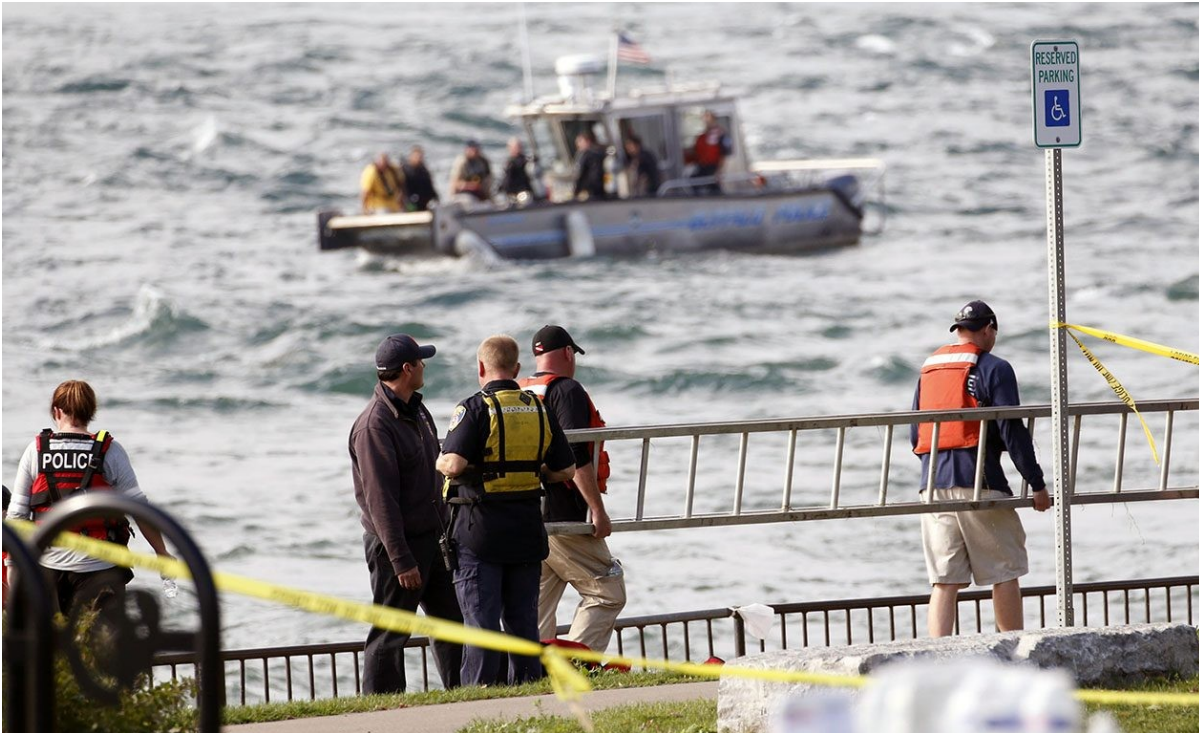
The notice of claim alleges that:

- The training exercise was allowed to take place "despite reasonably dangerous conditions."
- *Lehner, 34, was not sufficiently trained or supervised when he went into the water.*



**Many questions remain unanswered regarding the drowning death of Buffalo police diver Craig Lehner.**  
CREDIT FILE PHOTO





**The search for Buffalo Police Officer Craig Lehner went on for days before the body of the missing diver was recovered. (Sharon Cantillon/Buffalo News)**

- The diving equipment was in "dangerous, unsafe, and/or defective condition," wasn't properly inspected and was "inefficient to provide reasonable and adequate" protection for Lehner, creating the conditions that led to the equipment to fail and prevented Lehner's rescue.
- There wasn't an adequate communication system for police divers.
- Lehner's supervisors were "negligent, careless and/or incompetent" regarding the dive operation.
- The city and police department violated state labors laws in "failing to furnish its employees with a place of employment free from recognized hazard that caused or were likely to have caused death or serious physical harm to its employees."

The notice of claim does not specify damages being sought.

Buffalo police officials defended their longtime practice of training divers in the Niagara River.

"The Buffalo Police Department trains in those waters to be ready to respond if needed," said Buffalo Police Capt. Jeff Rinaldo.

Lehner's fatal dive was the police department's first training exercise in the Niagara River in 2017 and Lehner's first training in the Niagara.

The state Labor Department is conducting an investigation into Lehner's death. The Buffalo Police Department conducted its own investigation into the death and has not released the report. Police officials said Wednesday they want to review the Labor Department's findings before releasing their internal report.

Police sources said Wednesday the internal investigation found that Lehner's tether got snagged on a boulder at the bottom of the river, which spun him around in the water, causing the current to knock the regulator out of his mouth. They also said there were no indications of equipment failure.

After Lehner's death, the Buffalo's Underwater Recovery Team suspended training exercises in the Niagara River for the rest of the year.

Lehner was a nine-year veteran of the Buffalo Police Department and joined the Underwater Recovery Team in April 2017.

Before joining the team, prospective members need to be certified scuba divers. Once accepted, members train for a year before becoming a permanent member. Lehner was still going through the year of training.

The commander of the department's dive team, Leo McGrath, is not certified as a master diver or as a scuba instructor, police confirmed. But officials said that is not required.

When Lehner jumped Oct. 13 into the swift moving waters off Bird Island Pier, he was in water that was about 25 or 30 feet deep. A fellow member of the police Underwater Recovery Team was holding the tender line, which is standard practice for dives of this nature, police sources told The Buffalo News in October.

Lehner was in the water for less than five minutes when the team member holding the tether line noticed it suddenly tightened. The line then went slack, and then tightened again, police sources said.

His team members feared he was trapped, possibly tangled in old fishing lines or debris. A rescue effort followed, starting at about 12:50 p.m. Oct. 13. Two divers tried to follow the tender line down to Lehner but the current was too strong and they could not locate him, police sources described to The News.

Team members next threaded an emergency air tank to the tender line and attempted to send it down to Lehner, but again the current proved too strong and



**Donna Wilson, sister of fallen Buffalo Police Officer Craig Lehner, speaks to reporters after a ceremony in his honor in Lockport on Nov. 6, 2017.. (Thomas J. Prohaska/Buffalo News)**

the tank would not sink to the river bottom. It was later found floating near the pier.

The Buffalo police divers called for assistance, and the U.S. Coast Guard dispatched a 45-foot response boat that arrived at approximately 1:10 p.m., according to the Coast Guard.

With the tender cable extended to its full length, 300 feet, and attached to the boat, the Coast Guard crew pulled from different directions, hoping to un snag the line. A police diver went down on the line from the boat. But the line snapped, police sources said.

When Lehner's body was found floating in the river a few thousand feet north of the International Railway Bridge on Oct. 17, he was still wearing much of his gear, his air tank, a regulator, a buoyancy compensator and a 40-pound weight belt, according to police. His face mask was missing. He had with him two knives and a pair of surgical scissors.

Several inches of a tender line were still connected to a harness ring on Lehner's suit. The end of the line was frayed, and did not appear to have been cleanly cut, which likely means it tore or snapped and wasn't cut, police and diving experts consulted by The Buffalo News in October said.



**Officer Craig Lehner is laid to rest**

Divers are trained to ditch their weights and inflate the buoyancy compensator, a vest designed to fill up with air, if they need to get to the surface, diving experts said in October.

Lehner's tank was found more than half-full of air, about 1,600 psi (pounds per square inch), police said. The diving experts said that would provide as much as about an hour of air, depending on the diver's exertion levels.

An autopsy showed he had drowned and he had water in his lungs, police said. There was also a gash on his forehead and trauma to his head.

On WGRZ-TV, Channel 2, Daniela Porat of Investigative Post reported Wednesday evening Lehner had taken training dives five times in the still waters of the Buffalo River and Union Ship Canal. She added he had gotten his scuba certification in the Caribbean in 2014 in still waters.

Porat reported Lehner was not wearing a quick release device to disconnect from his tether. She noted the Buffalo Police Department does not use them and divers are trained to cut the rope on their connection. She said Lehner was not wearing a face mask that would allow him to communicate electronically with officers on the surface

## Training, Equipment Deficient In Police Drowning

<http://www.investigativepost.org/2018/02/13/training-equipment-deficient-in-police-drowning/>  
02-13-2018 By [Daniela Porat](#)

### ***With only a handful of practice dives, officer was probably ill-prepared to handle the hazards of the Niagara River***

The rapid-moving and debris-filled water of the Niagara River was unfamiliar territory to Officer Craig Lehner. His previous dives were in relatively calm and contained waters like the Buffalo River and the clear, warm Caribbean where he got his scuba certification.

Last October, Lehner was training with the Buffalo Police's Underwater Recovery Team in the Niagara River, the first time the team had trained there in over a year. While the team's commander, Detective Leo McGrath, has more than thirty years of diving experience, he is not certified to teach public safety diving.

Underwater, Lehner lacked the equipment to verbally communicate with his teammates and would have been limited to making signals with the tether line connecting him to his colleagues onshore. Lehner also did not have a piece of equipment that might have enabled him to free himself in the event his tether became tangled and trapped him underwater.



Lehner drowned and his body was recovered five days later after a frantic search by his teammates and other law enforcement agencies.

Investigative Post reviewed more than 130 pages of police records obtained through the state Freedom of Information Law and interviewed six diving professionals. These records and experts suggest that Lehner was inadequately trained and equipped for the dive that led to his death.

The diving professionals interviewed did not want to speak to the specifics of Lehner's drowning. But the best practices they described for public safety diving operations elsewhere stand in contrast to what's done here in Buffalo.





David Concannon, an attorney based in Pennsylvania who investigates diving fatalities, questioned why Lehner dove in such hazardous conditions for a training exercise.

"In my professional opinion, you don't put somebody into harm's way to train them for something that's unlikely to occur without really taking additional precautions," said Concannon.

"You don't trigger an avalanche to see somebody, to help somebody rescue someone from an avalanche. It's not necessary, it's unsafe."

Three weeks ago, Lehner's family filed a [notice of claim](#) against the city and police department, preserving their right to file a lawsuit. The claim argues that the Underwater Recovery Team acted with "negligence, recklessness, and carelessness." The notice also alleges that "unreasonably dangerous conditions" in the Niagara River, coupled with insufficient equipment, lack of "proper communication" and "incompetent" oversight of the dive led to Lehner's death. Buffalo Police officials declined to be interviewed, citing the possible lawsuit.

---

### **Jim Heaney Discusses The Story On The Capitol Press Room**

[http://ipost.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/2-15-18-Heaney.mp3?\\_u=1](http://ipost.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/2-15-18-Heaney.mp3?_u=1)

---

Lehner's death brought about an outpouring of public grief. People hung blue lights outside their homes. Thousands attended his [funeral](#) at the downtown hockey arena and lined Delaware Avenue to watch the procession pass to his burial site at Forest Lawn Cemetery.

McGrath spoke at the funeral.

"Since day one on the team, Craig was always calm, cool, and collected," he said. "He had so much confidence, you would have thought he was on the team for years."

## Received Limited Training

The Underwater Recovery Team searches for and retrieves evidence and bodies and performs the occasional rescue. The team is a secondary duty for its 18 members, whose primary assignments range from patrol to narcotics to the K-9 unit, where Lehner was deployed. Trainees are required to have baseline scuba skills to join the team.

Many members got their initial qualifications with Dip n' Dive, a local dive shop staffed with certified instructors. Lehner, a 34-year-old National Guard veteran who served in Iraq, received an advanced scuba diving certification in 2014 from a dive shop located at the U.S. Naval station at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

Even with an elementary background in diving, experts told Investigative Post that trainees should increase the difficulty of their dives incrementally and first learn how to manage crises in easy environments.

Records obtained by Investigative Post show that while Buffalo Police did conduct five training sessions with Lehner in placid waters, questions remain as to whether he was prepared to dive in the Niagara River's swift currents or whether his teammates were capable of rescuing him in the event of an emergency.

It's common practice to start trainees in what's referred to as "confined water."

"It means an easy entry, no turbulence on the surface, no waves, no added problems for a new diver," said Michael Sieverman, a public safety diving instructor and retired police officer based in California.

"Learning how to dive is learning how to solve problems, to either overcome them once they present or avoid them altogether before they become a problem." According to a [dive team record](#), Lehner "did well" but "came up too fast" on his first training dive in the Buffalo River in May, 2017.

Between that first session and September, Lehner dove four more times in either the Union Ship Canal or the Buffalo River. Those water bodies are different from the 10-to-15-mile-per-hour current of the Niagara River, which also has a lot of debris on the riverbed, including cars.

"You can't really train someone to experience something unless they actually experienced it, but you don't have to throw them in the deep-end," said Concannon, the attorney. "You can start in the shallow end and work your way down."

## Daniela Porat's Story For Wbfo

[https://cpa.ds.npr.org/wbfo/audio/2018/03/press\\_pass\\_03.09.18\\_mixdown\\_1.mp3](https://cpa.ds.npr.org/wbfo/audio/2018/03/press_pass_03.09.18_mixdown_1.mp3)

The team's training dives conducted in the two-and-half years preceding Lehner's death would not have necessarily prepared them for the incident in October. A majority of the team's training sessions were focused on recovery and practicing "search patterns," which involves practicing how to search and retrieve evidence or bodies. Most were in relatively still waters like the Erie Basin Marina, Union Ship Canal and the Buffalo River.

The team's training in the more dangerous waters of the Niagara River was limited to two dives in August 2015 and July 2016.

Dive logs show that the the last time the team was called out for an operation there was in May 2017 for a "body search." The record states there were "reports of person screaming in river." Police did not provide additional information about that incident.

The team trained in rescue techniques three times between January 2015 and September 2017, according to the documents obtained by Investigative Post.

Another four training sessions were conducted in [emergency procedures](#), like switching to backup air tanks. All seven sessions were conducted in relatively tranquil and confined waters, including one session in February 2015 at a city pool near Cazenovia Park.

The records have limited detail and police would not provide additional information about what these sessions involved or if there were other instances of emergency and rescue trainings that were not fully documented.

Four members of the dive team received training in swift water surface rescue, two in 2015 and two in 2017. Such experience would be helpful if someone were drowning near the surface in fast-moving water, for example. Lehner, however, was diving well below the surface, at a part of the river about 25 feet deep according to The Buffalo News.

The diving professionals interviewed raised concerns about the prudence of having a trainee dive in swift water.

"If it's searching for evidence or some other type, or it's a recovery, there's really no pressing reason to get in the water and push divers that hard," Sieverman said.

"If you have a mission to accomplish, ensure your risk is worth the reward. And for swift water, there are a multitude of dangers that come with that."

### Instructor Not Certified

McGrath, the commander of the Underwater Recovery Team, has been diving since the 1980s and has taken advanced courses, including one on "aquatic death and homicidal drowning investigation." But he is not certified to be a scuba instructor, let alone a public safety dive instructor, a police source confirmed.

The police source maintained that formal certification is unnecessary. However, diving industry professionals said it's preferable for those overseeing training to have official diving instructor qualifications.

Jeff Morgan, a public safety diving instructor based in Utah, said it's better for an instructor to get "accreditation from some type of training agency that would give that in-house training instructor some level of knowledge above and beyond just the general experience that he or she may have."

Concannon said that, generally speaking, a person might also pass on bad habits to trainees without formal instructor training.

"If you haven't had an instructor development course by an instructor trainer, you may never be aware that you're teaching somebody incorrect information."

A police source told Investigative Post that the department plans to send one of its new dive team members to a training course in Florida before the end of the year to become a certified public safety diving instructor.

McGrath declined multiple requests for an interview, citing pending litigation.

### **Not Provided Safety Equipment**

Lehner went underwater without two pieces of equipment that might have prevented his death: electronic communications and hardware that lets divers easily free themselves from their rope if it gets tangled.

Soon after Lehner dove into the Niagara River, the rope connecting him to his teammates tightened, likely a result of getting snagged on debris, according to press reports.

"Anytime you dive in swift-moving water or strong current, there is a heightened risk," said Morgan, the public safety diving instructor and former commander of the San Bernardino County Sheriff's dive team. "You need to make sure that your divers are prepared with the proper equipment and the proper procedures and certainly the proper training to perform in that environment."

For Morgan "the biggest advancement in public safety diving in recent years" is a particular mask built for electronic communications. Lehner was not wearing one for his dive in the Niagara River, however. The Buffalo News reported that had he worn one, the currents would have "ripped" it off.

"When you're in swiftwater," said Concannon, the attorney, "you're in a dangerous situation, every single time, and you need to be able to communicate effectively." Lehner's sole means of communicating was a rope connecting him to his colleagues onshore.

"A regular old rope which you would use in placid, still water, in a canal is not going to cut it," Concannon said.



The second piece of equipment Lehner lacked was a “quick-release snap shackle.” As its name suggests, it’s a piece of hardware that lets a diver easily disconnect from whatever line they are attached to.

A police source confirmed Lehner did not have that equipment. Instead he was attached to his tether with a harness ring, according to The Buffalo News. Divers are trained to cut the rope when they need to free themselves, a challenge when under stress and in strong currents.

A police source said that the department doesn’t use quick-release snap shackles because they can be dangerous when diving under surfaces such as ice. The diver in those situations no longer has a rope to guide them to their entry point into the water.

Lehner was not diving under ice, but in relatively warm waters that are about 65 degrees in October.

The circumstances of Lehner’s death are still under investigation by the Public Employee Safety and Health Bureau in the state’s Department of Labor. Buffalo Police finished its own investigation but has not released the report. Those investigations, and the possible lawsuit by his family, could determine precisely what role his training and equipment played in his death.

## **Lt. Craig Lehner Posthumously Awarded Nys Liberty Medal**

<http://www.wivb.com/news/local-news/lt-craig-lehner-posthumously-awarded-nys-liberty-medal/1127388183>

Apr 17, 2018 By: Kaley Lynch

**ALBANY, N.Y. (WIVB)** - Lt. Craig Lehner has been posthumously awarded the NY Senate's highest civilian honor.

Lt. Lehner, the Buffalo Police officer who died during a dive training operation in the Niagara River in October, has been awarded the NYS Liberty Medal.

Sen. Tim Kennedy (D-Buffalo) presented Lehner's mother Kathy and his sister, Donna Wilson, with the award.

“Lt. Craig Lehner was as selfless as they come - always eager to do one thing in life: help people,” Kennedy said. “In his short time with us, he chose to bravely serve his country and his community, and firmly believed in uplifting and encouraging those around him.”

Lehner was posthumously promoted from Officer to Lieutenant in February.



## Lieutenant Craig Lehner's Family Honored On Senate Floor

<https://www.wkbw.com/news/lieutenant-craig-lehners-family-honored-on-senate-floor>

Apr 17, 2018 [WKBW Staff](#)

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) - Fallen Buffalo Police Lieutenant Craig Lehner is being remembered on the Senate floor in Albany for his service.

Senator Tim Kennedy posthumously honored Lt. Lehner Tuesday with the New York State Liberty Medal.

Kennedy presented Lehner's family with the medal which is the state Senate's highest civilian honor.



Kennedy also introduced a resolution on Lt. Lehner's behalf, commending his service at the BPD as well as the Army National Guard.

Lt. Lehner was a nine-year veteran of the BPD. He died six months ago during an underwater training exercise.

### Buffalo Police Department Underwater Recovery Team Monthly Training

Date: 5/19/17

Location: Foot of Michigan

Water Temp: 54°

Team Members:

- Det Leo McGrath \_\_\_\_\_
- PO Michael Martinez \_\_\_\_\_
- PO John Kujawa Not Dive still recovering surgery
- LT Peter Kocol \_\_\_\_\_
- LT Sean O'Brien \_\_\_\_\_
- Det Robert Gonez Lake George training
- LT Michael Delong Not Dive
- Det Sean Buth \_\_\_\_\_
- PO Angela Yeates Not at training out of town
- PO Raymond Harrington Lake George training
- LT Darren Labeledz \_\_\_\_\_
- LT Patrick Humiston \_\_\_\_\_
- Det Shawn Adams \_\_\_\_\_
- LT Joseph Langdon \_\_\_\_\_
- LT Stephen Zipp \_\_\_\_\_
- PO John Sullivan \_\_\_\_\_
- PO Paul Fitzpatrick \_\_\_\_\_
- PO Kristin Russo \_\_\_\_\_
- PO Craig Lehner - 1st Day - did well - came up too fast

Comments: Changed location from Loacker Park  
practiced hooking cars in the lot at  
the Police Garage before dive.



# BUFFALO POLICE DEPARTMENT UNDER WATER RECOVERY TEAM DIVE LOG

DATE: AM 2/17/17  
 LOCATION OF DIVE: Foot of Ferry  
 OIC: Leo McBeah  
 PRIMARY DIVER #1 Steve Zipp #2 Joe Langdon  
 BACK UP DIVER: John Sullivan Pat Humiston  
 TENDERS: Sean Butn Shawn Adams  
 OTHER PERSONEL: \_\_\_\_\_

PRE DIVE BRIEFING: YES  NO \_\_\_\_\_  
 START OF DIVE TANK P.S.I.: Dive #1 3000 Diver #2 3000  
 BOTTOM TIME: Diver #1 13 Diver#2 12  
 MAXIMUM DEPTH: Diver#1 27 Diver#2 27  
 END OF DIVE TANK P.S.I.: Diver #1 2500 Diver #2 2500  
 WATER TEMPERATURE: 33°  
 POST DIVE BRIEFING: YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

ACTIVITIES PERFORMED: Switching Buck on Pump Bottle

COMMENTS:  
Ice Cover  
Dry Suits  
FFM  
Air Temp 27°

## Safety practices ignored in Lehner's drowning



<http://www.investigativepost.org/2018/05/01/lehner-search-story/>

May 1, 2018 By [Daniela Porat](#)

If training practices elsewhere are any indicator, the Buffalo Police Department had no business sending Officer Craig Lehner into the rapid currents of the Niagara River last October.

Depending on the agency, trainees for swift water diving elsewhere typically start out in water moving somewhere between 1 and 4 knots, or under 5 miles per hour. But the Niagara River on the day Lehner trained – and drowned – was moving at a much faster clip – between 8 and 12 knots, or up to nearly 14 miles per hour.

[Records obtained from the U.S. Coast Guard](#) show that some divers on scene were uncomfortable diving in the river's swift current.

Documents obtained under a Freedom of Information Act request show the Buffalo division of the Coast Guard was asked the day after Lehner went missing to identify "a more qualified dive team due to the significant current in the area."

"Local divers on scene were not comfortable diving in that current," the document continues.

Investigative Post [reported in February](#) that Lehner did not have crucial equipment to undertake such an advanced dive and that he had previously trained in mostly calm and confined water.

---

**Listen to our story broadcast on WBFO**

[http://ipost.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/180501\\_Lehner\\_mixdown\\_01.mp3?\\_=1](http://ipost.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/180501_Lehner_mixdown_01.mp3?_=1)

---

Diving in a fast current like that of the Niagara River is a specialized skill that requires the right equipment and a lot of training.

While none of the half-dozen public safety diving professionals Investigative Post interviewed wanted to speak specifically about the incident involving Lehner, the safety precautions and training procedures they describe for swift water diving differ from what goes in Buffalo.

Robert Shields, captain of a public safety dive team in Rhode Island, said the faster the current "the more difficult it is to control yourself as a diver."

"Currents can pin you against an object, so whether it's a branch, or a stump, or a car, under the water you can get pinned," he said. "And if you don't have the ability to break free, you're kind of stuck there until somebody can come and help you."

To manage these risks, public safety diving professionals set a limit on how rapid a current they conduct training in. For some teams, it's 1 to 1.5 knots.

Jeff Morgan, a public safety diver who has trained local, state, and federal law enforcement, as well as the military, said he trains in up to 4 knots of current. Experts advise wearing electronic communications devices while diving in swift water to facilitate easy and safe communication with colleagues above water. But Lehner lacked that equipment on his fateful dive.

The Coast Guard doesn't have dive teams at the ready to conduct underwater rescues. Its search and rescue operations are geared towards saving people at the water's surface. Lehner, however, was diving about 25 feet underwater.

Records show the Coast Guard sent a response boat soon after the Buffalo police dive team realized Lehner was trapped. Once the boat arrived, the police asked the Coast Guard to try to un snag Lehner's tether by moving it in different directions. Once they did, "it was discovered that the line was cut," according to one of the records.

"The missing diver's secondary oxygen tank and mouthpiece resurfaced in view of where the tether line entered the water."

---

At least eight law enforcement and rescue agencies responded to aid the Buffalo police in its search operations the day of, or day after, Lehner's drowning. The state police and the Rochester Police Department deployed divers.

The search for Lehner's body went on for five days, with divers battling currents that ranged between 8 to 15 knots, or up to 17 miles per hour.

"The challenges the divers and sonar teams face today is the strong and variable current," states a Coast Guard record.

Lehner was found later that day, on Oct. 17. His death triggered an outpouring of public grief rarely witnessed in Buffalo.

The Buffalo police declined to comment for this story. Lehner's family has filed a notice of claim, a precursor to a lawsuit, against the city and the police department, citing "negligence, recklessness and carelessness" in the training and supervision of the dive team.

The state's Public Employee Safety and Health Bureau in the Department of Labor is also conducting an investigation.

## **Report: Four Serious Violations On Day Of Craig Lehner's Death**

<http://spectrumlocalnews.com/nys/buffalo/crime-safety/2018/10/06/craig-lehner-buffalo-police-pesh-investigation>

October 6, 2018 By Spectrum News Staff

An safety investigation into the untimely death of Craig Lehner, the Buffalo Police Lieutenant who never resurfaced during a training exercise in the Niagara River in October 2017, found four violations designated as serious. Lehner was 34 years old, also a K9 officer, and still mourned across the region.



The department held a press conference Saturday after obtaining the Public Employee Safety and Health report, which noted that police dive teams have to comply with the commercial diving standards that are used in the private sector.

In the report were four violations deemed as serious and one as non-serious. A police spokesman said that a "substantial" number of the violations were related to paperwork, record keeping, documentation, and procedural related to training in the river.



[Oct 6, 2018 Maura Christie](#)[@maurachristieTV](#)

[Replying to @maurachristieTV](#)

BPD received copy of completed PESH report yesterday. They were given 60 days to comply with four violations, Rinaldo says mainly to do with paperwork

This is the full copy of report, that outlines violations better as well as other findings

[pic.twitter.com/KsJaKuntVU](https://pic.twitter.com/KsJaKuntVU) [12:31 PM - Oct 6, 2018](#) · [Buffalo, NY](#)

DIVISION OF SAFETY AND HEALTH  
PUBLIC EMPLOYEE SAFETY AND HEALTH BUREAU

**INVESTIGATION NARRATIVE**

REPORTING DISTRICT:	Buffalo	
INVESTIGATION TYPE	ESTABLISHMENT NAME AND SITE ADDRESS	
COMPLAINT	ACCIDENT	
ACCIDENT	Buffalo City Police Department Headquarters	
PROGRAMMED	Broderick Park	
MONITORING	Buffalo, NY 14213	
FOLLOWUP	DATES OF INVESTIGATION	INSPECTION NUMBER
X FATALITY	10/18/17, 11/8/17, 11/29/17, 11/30/17, 12/5/17, 12/6/17, 12/14/17, 2/20/18, 3/15/18, 3/22/18, 3/28/18, 3/29/18, 4/10/18, 4/17/18, 4/18/18, 6/13/18, 6/19/18	1272015 / UPA# 1275537

On 10/18/17, a partial safety and health inspection was conducted at the Buffalo City Police Department Headquarters, 74 Franklin Street, Buffalo, NY 14202 by Senior Safety & Health Inspector Jennifer Puerner. The inspector left a voicemail for Lieutenant Rinaldo on 10/13/17 at 3:45 pm to explain that PESH was aware of an incident involving the Buffalo City Police Department Underwater Rescue and Recovery Team (URRT) and asked him to call when additional information was available.

The inspection was conducted in response to a fatality that occurred in the Niagara River west of Broderick Park, 1170 Niagara Street, Buffalo, NY 14213. The incident occurred on 10/13/17 at approximately 12:49 pm, and the employee's body was recovered on 10/17/17 at approximately 1:25 pm. The fatality was reported to the New York State Department of Labor Public Employee Safety and Health Bureau on 10/18/17. Due to the high-profile nature and media coverage of the incident, reporting of the fatality was managed through previously established contact with employer representatives of the Buffalo City Police Department.

**Initial Incident Description**  
On 10/13/17, at approximately 12:45 pm, an employee from the Buffalo City Police Department Underwater Rescue and Recovery Team (URRT) was participating in a training exercise in the Niagara River west of Broderick Park in the City of Buffalo. The employee's tether, which connected the diver to the dive tender on shore, became snagged in the river. Attempts to free the tether and rescue the employee were unsuccessful and eventually the tether "parted." The employee did not surface and went missing. Multiple agencies performed an extensive five-day search and the body of the employee was recovered at approximately 1:25 pm on 10/17/17.

**Victim Information:**  
Name: Craig E. Lehner  
Date of Birth: 11/10/82  
Age: 34  
Date of Employment: 1/18/08 (9 years, 9 months)  
Joined the URRT: April 2017 (6 months)

[Katie Gibas@KatieGibasTV](mailto:KatieGibas@KatieGibasTV)

. @BPDAlerts Capt. Rinaldo says PESH found that there were "Not clear standards for diving training." The #Buffalo police are in the process of correcting four "serious" and one "minor" violations noted in the report. #WATCH #LIVE <http://specne.ws/wnylive> .12:24 PM - Oct 6, 2018

### The violations listed in the report:

- Underwater rescue and recovery divers were not equipped with a diver-carried reserve of breathing gas supplies.
- The Buffalo Police did not properly assess all safety and health aspects of the training dive that day.



- The BPD's Safe Practices Manual did not include safety and equipment procedures or checklists, assignments and responsibilities of dive team members and emergency procedures for fire, equipment failure or mental illness or injury.
- Not all dive team members had experience or training in diving operations and emergency procedures.
- And dive logs did not include time entries, diving mides or describe visibility and current conditions.

In the report, PESH also found no standards for Police Department Dive Teams.

## **Buffalo Police Release New Details About Diving Death Of Lt. Craig Lehner Staff Report**

<https://www.democratandchronicle.com/story/news/2018/10/07/buffalo-dive-team-craig-lehner-safety-violations/1558185002/>

Oct. 7, 2018

On Monday, Oct. 16, 2017 Rochester Police assisted in the search for Buffalo Police Underwater Recovery Team member Craig Lehner. A year later, a report by the PESH agency concluded that police dive units need to comply with commercial standards. Images provided by WGRZ

The Public Safety Employee Health agency, investigating the death of police diver Lt. Craig Lehner found that there are not currently clear standards for police dive teams. PESH concluded that police dive teams, including the Buffalo Police URT, need to comply with commercial diving standards.

Buffalo Police released new details about the investigation Saturday afternoon. Officer Lehner died during a dive training exercise with the department's Underwater Recovery Team in the Niagara River. He went missing on October 13, 2017, and his body was recovered four days later on October 17th.

The Buffalo Police Homicide Unit was the lead agency in the investigation, but they worked with PESH — Public Employee Safety and Health. The agency looks into any on-the-job deaths of public employees.

Captain Jeff Rinaldo said PESH consulted with dive experts, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), and other police dive teams before reaching its conclusion.

PESH also found four serious violations and one "non-serious" violation concerning the Buffalo Police dive team and its operations.

WGRZ obtained a copy of the report and found these four serious violations:

1. The department did not ensure all members had training or experience in emergency procedures.
2. The Safe Practices Manual did not include adequate safety procedures.
3. The department did not have a sufficient breathing gas supply including reserves.
4. During the dive training on 10/13/17 members performed dives without a reserve breathing gas supply.



**(Photo: Provided photo)**

Captain Rinaldo said many issues have been corrected already, prior to the release of the PESH report. The department has 60 days (longer if necessary) to address any remaining violations.

Captain Rinaldo said he expects the department to be in full compliance in the allotted timeframe. He said the department will start submitting its proposed changes to the agency as early as next week.

PESH did not issue any fines.

Captain Rinaldo said the agency's findings are not an admission of guilt. He said he can't get into where liability rests because of pending litigation.

In July, Lehner's family filed a wrongful death lawsuit against City Hall and the Buffalo Police. The lawsuit contends the city and police department "violated and departed from" the rules and regulations guiding dive training.

Captain Rinaldo said the department always reevaluates and reassesses its operations.

"With any of our specialized squads we are always looking at newer equipment and training, the best that we can provide," said Rinaldo. "We're always auditing our teams. What is out there and what is the best. Any time you have a tragedy like this occur, you take a timeout. You review what you are doing, what could have been done better."

Captain Rinaldo said about a month ago an outside company came in and available team members were put through a swift water rescue training. The multi-day course addressed the latest dive standards.

The Buffalo Police Department has suspended its training in the Niagara River but says it is ready to respond to emergencies in the river if called to do so.

## **Divers Weigh In on Report on BPD Lt. Craig Lehner's Death**

<http://spectrumlocalnews.com/nys/buffalo/news/2018/10/08/divers-weigh-in-on-pesh-report>

By Katie Gibas | October 8, 2018

Anthony Anderson has been diving for 52 years. He has thousands of dives under his belt and trains Public Safety divers.

"Things can go south no matter how hard you try to make it right," said Anthony Anderson, co-owner of Phoenix Scuba and Water Sports and a public safety diver trainer.

Carole Anderson has dived hundreds of times in her nearly two decades under the water. Both have extensive experience diving the furious currents of the Niagara River.

"Took me about five years of just getting farther up into the current because that current, it moves you where it wants to. You don't fight it. You work with it or you lose," said Carole Anderson, a co-owner of Phoenix Scuba and Water Sports.

That's why they say training is critical, something a [recently released state report](#) said was [lacking](#) in the Buffalo Police Department. The Public Employee Safety and Health Bureau investigated Lt. Craig Lehner's death during a training exercise in the Niagara River off Broderick Park a year ago.

The report shows Lehner joined BPD's Underwater Rescue and Recovery Team six months before the incident and had completed five dives in relatively protected waters with the team. The report states October 13, 2017 was his first dive with the team in a swift water environment. The current was moving at 10-15 knots with a visibility of three to four feet.

"There are other places in the river that could have been used for training that could have been used to get him up to that level," Anthony Anderson said. "At Isle View, you're at anywhere from half a knot to one and a half knots. It's like the difference between flat water kayaking and white water kayaking." In the report, BPD stated that dive members must complete a series of progressive skills, such as pool dives, then moving up to a lake, then river.

It also said the dive team completes an average of 12 trainings per year. "It's reasonable. Ideally, it should be more than that," said Anthony Anderson.

One to two of those are rescue or self-rescue training dives, which Lieutenant Lehner had not completed at the time of his death.

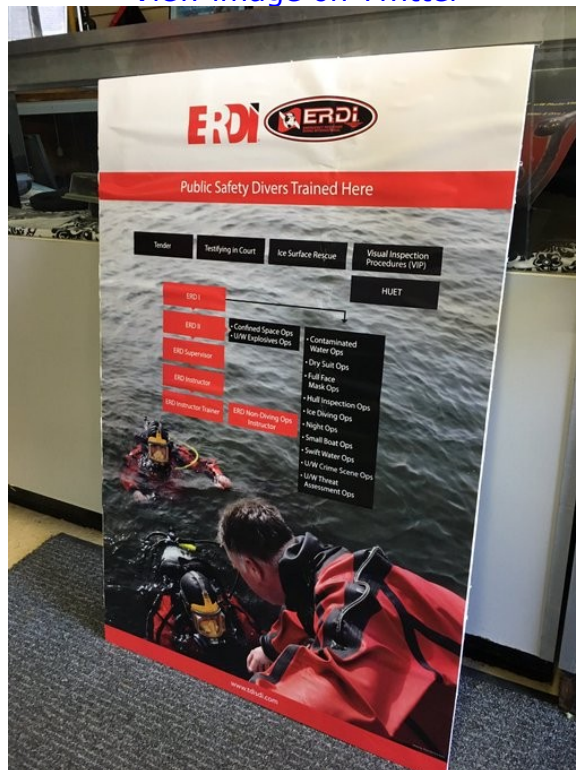
"That made me sad that that's as good as they feel they need to be for a group of divers who have the expectation of maybe having to do that sort of a dive," Carole Anderson said. "That's not a lot of help. That's not a lot of confidence on their part in that type of water. I would want more."

The owners of [@scuba\\_phoenix](#) train public safety divers throughout WNY. They're breaking down the PESH report on Lt. Craig Lehner's death and share some of their concerns about BPD's dive team's training.

The Andersons say there were a lot of questions the report did not answer, such as what exactly are BPD's protocols and training, how many dives did Lt. Lehner have in general, how long had he been diving, how many times had he dove with the BPD-issued equipment, and the specifics of what happened in the waters off Broderick Park that day.

Because of pending litigation, these were not questions the Buffalo Police Department could comment on. But on Saturday, police spokesperson Captain Jeff Rinaldo said the department must submit their changes, including the establishment of training procedures specific to the Niagara River, to PESH within 60 days. They had planned to do that this week.

[View image on Twitter](#)



12:47 PM - Oct 8, 2018

[See Katie Gibas's other Tweets](#)  
[Katie Gibas@KatieGibasTV](#)



"Any time you have a tragedy like this occur, you take a time out and you review what you're doing, what you could have done better and you adjust accordingly," he said Saturday.

## **Lt. Craig Lehner: Looking Ahead To Family's Lawsuit After Release Of State Report**

<https://www.wgrz.com/article/news/local/lt-craig-lehner-looking-ahead-to-familys-lawsuit-after-release-of-state-report/71-602173807>

October 8, 2018 Author: Emily Lampa

### **What does the state's assessment of Lt. Lehner's death mean for his family's lawsuit against the city? Our legal analyst breaks it down.**

BUFFALO - Five days from now will be exactly one year since Lt. Craig Lehner's drowning death in the Niagara River after a dive team training exercise on October 13, 2017.

This past Saturday, Buffalo Police released the Public Employee Safety and Health report, which outlines what went wrong that day. PESH is an agency under the NYS Division of Safety and Health.

**More:** [Police Provide Update on Lt. Craig Lehner Death Investigation](#)

2 On Your Side reached out to Lt. Lehner's family Monday to find out how they're reacting to the details of this report.

The family's lawyer, Aaron Glazer, summed up their reaction in five words, "The report speaks for itself."

The family's lawsuit alleges that Buffalo Police had not properly trained or prepared her brother for the dangerous conditions on the Niagara River which the complaint claims was moving too fast for training that day.

**More:** [Lehner family sues over police diver's drowning](#)

**More:** [Records show training, equipment deficient in Craig Lehner's drowning](#)

It also contends that the dive team leader was not certified to train and that Lehner didn't have necessary equipment which might have helped him disconnect from his tether.

The PESH report shows that Lehner's tether had gotten stuck on a large boulder. At some point, the tether broke. Investigators found marks on the portion of tether attached to Lehner's harness which show he had tried to cut the cable himself. Police found his body four days later.

**More:** [POLICE: Officer Lehner's body located](#)

PESH found that BPD did not properly assess all safety and health aspects of the training dive that day; from speed of the current to risk of entanglement.

State investigators also found the city in violation for not equipping Lehner and the other divers with reserve air tanks, for deficient line-tending from shore, and for failing to provide Lehner with self-rescue training.

"This was a tragic accident," said attorney, Steven Cohen, providing legal analysis for this story. "That being said, this PESH report does indicate negligence. Whether a jury finds that negligence to be approximate cause of death of Officer Lehner, is for a finder of fact...a judge or a jury."

Cohen added, "I think this requires some additional discovery to see if the negligence of the city, the clear negligence of the city, was in fact approximate cause of officer Lehner's death. And if that's found to be the case, after the evidence comes out, the city certainly should settle to prevent the family from having to go through an emotionally horrendous lawsuit."

Glazer said there has already been a pre-trial conference and the next step in this case is for the parties to take a look at the evidence, collect depositions, go through the necessary motions and then go to trial.

Since there is no scheduling order, Glazer says the family is prepared to wait several years before this case heads to trial. Cohen believes the earliest a case like this could be resolved in court is 2020.

MORE: [K-9 training facility renamed in memory of Lt. Craig Lehner](#)

## **I-Team: Significant Equipment Purchased After Lehner's Death**

<https://www.wkbw.com/news/i-team/i-team-significant-equipment-purchased-after-lehners-death>  
Oct 12, 2018 By: [Ed Drantch](#)

## **Lehner's Sister Visits Scene For The First Time**

For the first time since his death, Buffalo Police Lt. Craig Lehner's sister, Donna Wilson, visited the spot where her brother perished. Lehner was training underwater, with the Buffalo Police Underwater Recovery Team, on October 13, 2017. His body was found days later.

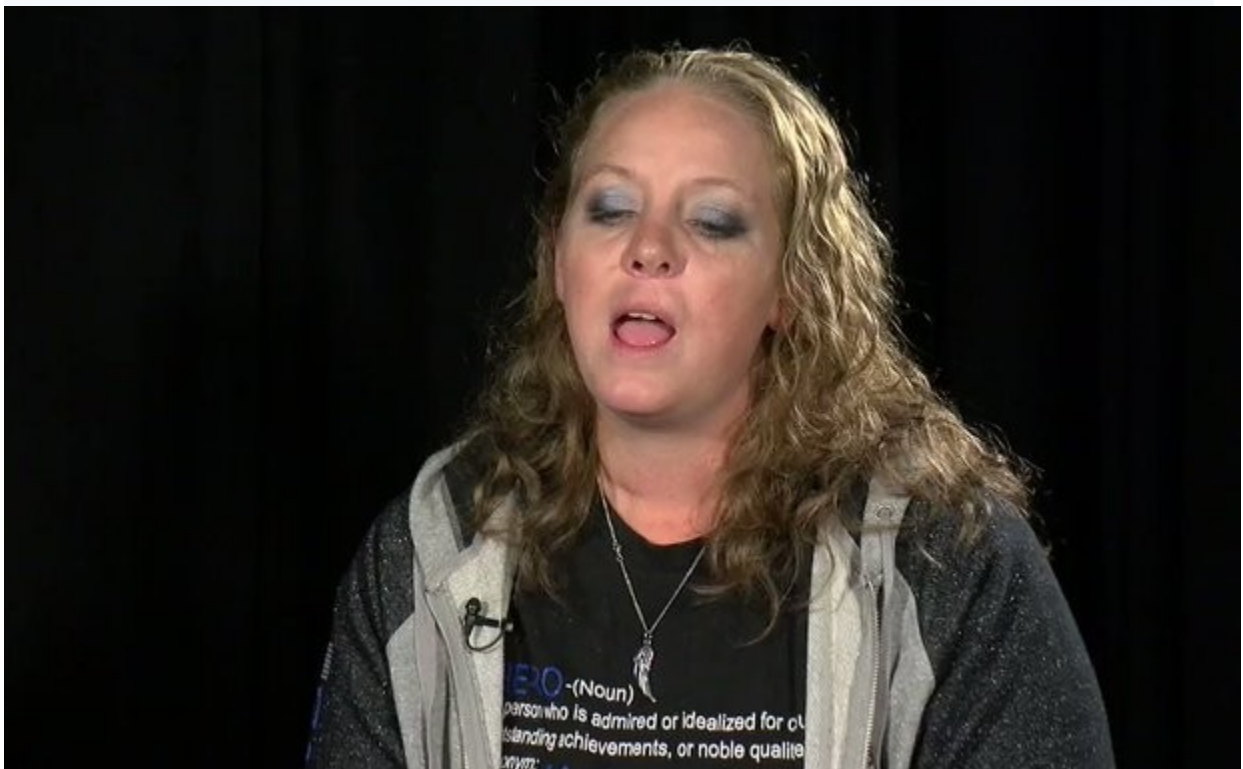
Wilson said, "I almost feel like I need to go but I'm scared to go...there's still a lot of anger. It's a process. Grief is a process."

Part of the process has this included a search for answers and a reason why Lehner died. By all accounts, was supposed to be a routine training exercise in the Niagara River.

Wilson has filed a wrongful death lawsuit against the City of Buffalo and the Buffalo Police Department. The lawsuit claims Lehner "suffered pre-death terror, conscious pain and suffering" underwater before he passed.

"Was this something that could have been prevented," Wilson questioned. "To see someone else go through what we've had to go through... we'll do anything we can to make sure it doesn't."

**ANOTHER TWITTER EXTRA:** Craig Lehner's sister describes "being a Lehner" and the signs she believes she's received from Craig, when she's wanted to give up the most. My full investigation: [@WKBW](https://www.wkbw.com/news/i-team/i-team-significant-equipment-purchased-after-lehners-death...)



Lehner was attached to a tether, when was snagged on a boulder underwater. A new state report shows the tether was cut in three different places. A source says the line was frayed at arm's length, indicating, they say, at some point he cut the line himself. Lehner's EMT sheers were missing from his harness when his body was recovered.

As a public safety diver, Lehner did not have a quick-release snap shackle. Experts say this could have helped him in an emergency.

**See how a quick-release snap shackle works, [here](#) .**

"You could come to the surface, but it would enable you to get out of the entrapment," said diving expert Brett Galambos.

Galambos works with Robson Forensic in Pennsylvania . He says a snap shackle provides a safety and redundancy for public safety divers. Any major agency, Galambos said, would or should have them.

"The need for safety...for the safety divers --or the rescue divers -- is paramount because if they cannot be safe themselves, how could they either rescue somebody or recover somebody," Galambos questioned.

In its response to the civil lawsuit, the City of Buffalo argues Lehner "may have failed to utilize available safety devices," but did not elaborate.

The City of Buffalo would not officially comment for this story.

The 7 Eyewitness News I-Team has obtained a list of the URT's equipment inventory and those snap shackles are not listed. They are not listed as part of this year's \$21,000 budget either. We got a copy of the budget through an official request.

A high-ranking police source says they've been ordered along with everything on that budget.

The budget was submitted in the months after Lehner's death. It includes six Sartek Industries RSV-1 "modular control valves," which "in an emergency, divers can share breathing gases without the exposure to contaminants or cold water," allowing a diver to switch supplies in "less than a second."

Sartek reports this is "particularly useful to a diver...with a full face mask" and becomes trapped.

**See how the RSV-1 works, [here](#).**

But sources connected to this case say Lehner was not wearing a full face mask during the dive in the Niagara River. Experts say a full face mask for public safety divers is standard.

"I don't know anything specific about this case, but I have seen instances where certain agencies don't have the proper training or equipment to enable them to do their job safely," Galambos said.

Training documents obtained by the I-Team show, Lehner had done five training dives before this dive in the Niagara River; three in the Union Ship Canal and two at the foot of Michigan.

There is no documentation that Lehner ever trained in swift water, before the deadly dive in the river.



**TWITTER EXTRA:** Craig Lehner's sister, Donna, describes the house Craig was in the process of buying before he died. He felt he got a sign from his father, who's since passed. Our @WKBW investigation, tonight at 11.

[https://www.wkbw.com/news/i-team/i-team-significant-equipment-purchased-after-lehners-death ...](https://www.wkbw.com/news/i-team/i-team-significant-equipment-purchased-after-lehners-death...)



Aaron Glazer, the family's attorney, told the I-Team,

*"The lawsuit alleges, among other things, Officer Lehner did not receive proper training to dive in fast moving water before he is subjected to a current such as the Niagara."*

A year later, there are still many questions and many emotions.

"I'm angry at God for letting that happen," Wilson said. "I know this is part of his plan and I know I have to have faith...but I'm mostly just angry and upset he's gone."

There is another court date scheduled for October 22 in Wilson's case against the City of Buffalo and the Buffalo Police Department.

## **Vigil to remember late police officer Craig Lehner, one year later**

<http://news.wbfo.org/post/vigil-remember-late-police-officer-craig-lehner-one-year-later>  
10-17-2018 By RYAN ZUNNER

It was one year ago today that the Buffalo Police officer Craig Lehner's body was recovered by crews in the Niagara River near Broderick Park.

Lehner died after being trapped underwater during a diving training exercise. One year to the date his body was discovered, law enforcement officers and community members will come together from 6-8 p.m. Wednesday at that same spot to remember his life.



**Buffalo police officer Craig Lehner's body was recovered one year ago today.**

**CREDIT FILE PHOTO**

team that he was caught in the swift currents of the Niagara River last October. It was later revealed that shortly after his initial plunge into the river, the safety line attached to his scuba suit snapped, causing him to drown.

The candlelight vigil is being held by the Buffalo Police Benevolent Association at Broderick Park, where visitors can pay their respects and honor the memory of Lehner. His former K-9 partner, Shield, is also expected to be in attendance.

## **Family Of Craig Lehner, Buffalo Officer Who Drowned During Dive, Likely To Receive \$1.2 Million**

<https://www.wbfo.org/2021-10-13/family-of-craig-lehner-buffalo-officer-who-drowned-during-dive-to-receive-1-2-million>

October 13, 2021 WBFO-FM 88.7 | BY TOM DINKI

"You go to work one day, you may not come home," says Buffalo Police Captain Jeff Rinaldo. "Whether it's on a traffic stop, chasing a bad guy with a gun, or it's training in high risk situations, there's always that risk, and it's a risk that we as police officers freely accept."

For Rinaldo and the rest of the officers of the Buffalo Police Department, it brings back a time of grief and mourning from losing one of their own.

"It's a very sad time in the police department," he says. "We're all kind of reliving what we went through last year. But it's a time to honor Craig and his family and just remember the great sacrifice that he made."

Lehner, a nine-year veteran of the force, was a member of the department's Underwater Recovery Team, in addition to his regular duties with the K-9 unit. It was while a member of that recovery



*Buffalo Police Department*

Buffalo Police Officer Craig Lehner died while dive training in the Niagara River in 2017. On Wednesday, the Buffalo Common Council's Claims Committee approved a \$1.2 million settlement for his estate.

Exactly four years to the day since Buffalo Police Officer Craig Lehner drowned while dive training in the Niagara River, the Buffalo Common Council's Claims Committee approved a \$1.2 million settlement for Lehner's estate.

The committee voted unanimously Wednesday to approve the wrongful death settlement, which totals \$1.275 million and is expected to be approved by the full Common Council next week.

"We know that nothing ever replaces a life, but I think that it is so important that we encourage not only [Lehner's] family, but the other men and women who have given and risked their lives for the safety of so many people," said Council President Darius Pridgen shortly before voting to approve the settlement. "And so I just wanted to make sure that his family knows that this council, we continue to grieve with them."

Lehner, 35, was a nine-year veteran of the Buffalo Police Department and a member of its Underwater Recovery Team. He failed to resurface after his line got caught on a boulder while diving about 25 feet below the surface of the Niagara River for a training exercise on Oct. 13, 2017. His body was recovered four days later.

Lehner's sister, Donna Wilson, filed a wrongful death lawsuit against the City of Buffalo in 2018, alleging among other things that Buffalo police did not properly train her brother before he went in the water.

Prior to approving the settlement Wednesday, the Claims Committee went into executive session for about 15 minutes. Timothy Ball, the city's corporation counsel, told council members any discussion regarding liability should be discussed behind closed doors because "it could impact other cases."

Councilmember Rasheed Wyatt called the Lehner claim the most difficult one the council has settled in many years.

"Most times [processing claims against the city], I'm trying to cut corners and find ... but I would not do that in this particular case," he said. "An officer lost his life and his family is going to suffer and there's no amount of money that's going to replace him."

An investigation by the state Department of Labor found Buffalo police failed to properly train and equip Lehner. It cited the department for four federal safety violations, including failure to provide Lehner with self-rescue training and a reserve air tank.

The investigation also found Buffalo police failed to recognize the hazardous conditions of the Niagara River the day Lehner drowned. Experts say it's normal to dive train in water that's moving between one and four knots, but the river currents that day were eight to 12 knots.

Councilmember David Rivera, a retired Buffalo police officer, said Buffalo police's Underwater Recovery Team now has the proper equipment and training.

"We want to make sure that anytime an officer goes into the water to rescue and recover someone, that they are well equipped and we do everything possible to prevent something like this from reoccurring," he said. "Officers are going to go into the same waters under the same conditions, so we just want to make sure that they have all the equipment, all the training that's needed to survive and come back out safely."

Rivera said it was coincidental that the committee approved the settlement on the four-year anniversary of Lehner's death.

"It's kind of strange," he said. "We talked about it: It's four years to the day. It wasn't planned this way."



Council members expect the full council to approve the settlement at their regular meeting on Tuesday.

## City Of Buffalo Reaches Settlement Agreement With Estate Of Craig Lehner

<https://www.wivb.com/news/local-news/buffalo/city-of-buffalo-reaches-settlement-with-estate-of-craig-lehner/>

**Oct 13, 2021 / Updated: Oct 14, 2021 / by: Chris Horvatits**

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WIVB) — The estate of Buffalo Police Lieutenant Craig Lehner and the City of Buffalo have reached a tentative \$1.275 million settlement agreement, the attorney representing Lehner's sister told News 4.

The Buffalo Common Council's Claims Committee approved the settlement at its meeting Wednesday morning. It will now go to the full council for a vote, which is expected to happen next week.

Lehner went missing on October 13, 2017, four years to the day that the committee vote took place, during a training exercise in the Niagara River. His body was found days later.

Donna Wilson, Lehner's sister, filed a lawsuit in 2018, claiming that among other things, the city failed to develop a standard operating procedure which addressed strategies and tactics for the type of training exercise Lehner was performing and failed to evaluate the risk of the training exercise. The suit also said the city didn't provide the proper equipment. In its response to the lawsuit, the city denied those claims.

Aaron Glazer, the attorney for his sister, says the family has found peace knowing that their claim has created a safer work environment for Buffalo police divers. "The term hero gets tossed around a lot in our society, but Lieutenant Lehner was a hero in the flesh. The Lehner family has been through more tragedy than most people could imagine, and the resolution of this claim brings an extremely sad chapter of their lives to a close," Glazer said.

Councilman Mitch Nowakowski, the chairman of the Claims Committee, said the council hopes the claim provides a "form of conclusion" to the family. He noted avoiding a trial and the pain a trial would cause was an important consideration. "We know that money is nothing in replacement of a human life," Nowakowski said.

*Chris Horvatits is an award-winning reporter who joined the News 4 team in December 2017. See more of his work [here](#).*



# Buffalo Common Council formally approves \$1.275 million settlement with estate of police officer

<https://www.wgrz.com/article/news/local/buffalo-common-council-formally-approves-1275-million-settlement-with-estate-of-police-officer/71-08ddae12-1540-4d1a-b727-c7774b00736f>

October 19, 2021 Dave McKinley, Terry Belke

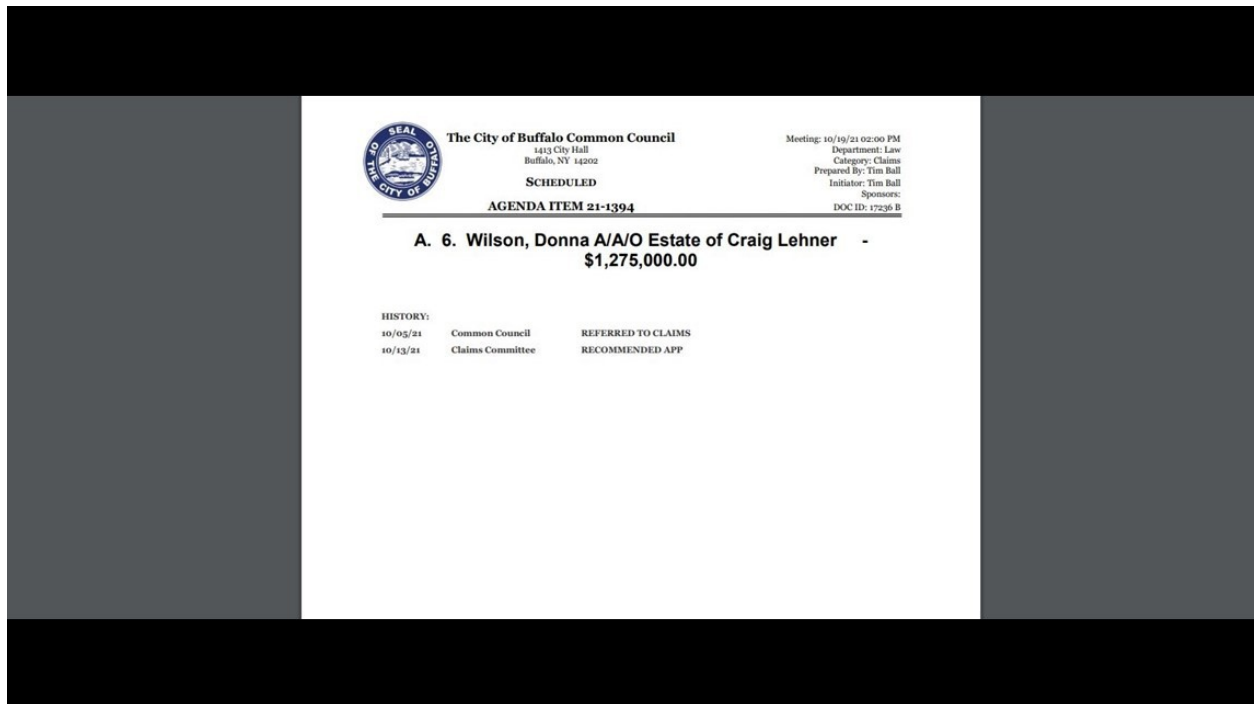
Lt. Craig Lehner, a member of the Underwater Recovery Team, died in a tragic training accident on the Niagara River four years ago

BUFFALO, N.Y. — Buffalo's Common Council on Tuesday formally approved a settlement of nearly \$1.275 million settlement with the estate of Craig Lehner. Lehner was a Buffalo Police Lieutenant who, as a member of the police department's underwater recovery team, was killed during a training exercise in October of 2017.

Lehner's family later filed a wrongful death suit against the city and its police department.

"I never got to meet him," said Common Council President Darius Pridgen. "But there were two words I wrote down about him. One was 'dedicated' and the other was 'brave'."

Despite the size of the settlement, the measure was passed without debate, something which Pridgen also made note of.



"I want to thank each of my council colleagues, for in this instance, and especially in this instance, for (acting) more with our hearts in mind rather than our pocketbooks."

### **Lessons Learned**

"Training and equipment," was how Buffalo Police Deputy Commissioner Joseph Gramaglia responded when asked by 2 on Your Side what measures have been taken since Lehner's death to better safeguard dive team members in hopes of avoiding a similar tragedy.

The [official incident report](#) concluded Lehner drown after his tether line became snagged on a boulder 25 feet under the water.

It also found that Lehner was not wearing something which might have saved him, but which Gramaglia says divers are now equipped with called a snap shackle.

"That snap shackle is a way that they can pull on that rope and it will disengage and free the diver from that tether," Gramaglia said.

Meanwhile, four years later members of the police dive team still train in the swiftly moving and dangerous waters of the Niagara River near the foot of Ferry Street and not far from where their colleague died.

"We have to maintain our proficiency in those waters," said Gramaglia, noting numerous incidents since Lehner's death in which people and even vehicles have ended up in the water and needed the assistance of the dive team.

"Wherever you are and whatever part of the country you are in, you have to be proficient in what's in your back yard. We still have to go in there and we still have to how to dive in it (the river) when we do," Gramaglia said."

Lt. Lehner was a dedicated police officer. What happened still weighs in our hearts, he's sorely missed, and we will never forget."