

10-19-1999 – Marthas Vinyard - Richard F. Madeiras GM LEO Boat Accident

Coast Guard searches for shellfish constable off Martha's Vineyard

http://www.boston.com/dailynews/292/region/Coast_Guard_searches_for_shell:.shtml

10/19/99 By Associated Press

OAK BLUFFS, Mass. (AP) Coast Guard crews and firefighters searched for a shellfish constable who fell from his boat off the town's East Chop section.

Richard F. Madeiras was working on his boat at around 1:10 p.m. when it made a sharp move and he fell overboard, said Lt. Craig Jaramillo of the Coast Guard.



Jaramillo said Madeiras may have been wearing hip waders, which could have filled up with water and dragged him down. He apparently was not wearing a life jacket.

Police on the scene said a jogger witnessed the accident and flagged down a passerby with a cellular phone. But Madeiras had vanished by the time help arrived.

At about 7 p.m. Tuesday, the Coast Guard called off the search for the day. The Coast Guard was planning to resume the search today, as were divers from the Oak Bluffs Fire Department, according to the Coast Guard.

Madeiras, 44, a longtime Oak Bluffs resident with a wife and two children, was the subject of a search involving about a dozen boats and a Coast Guard helicopter. Divers from the Oak Bluffs fire department also joined the search.

As shellfish constable, Madeiras helped maintain the area's shellfishing grounds. It wasn't clear if he was acting in his official capacity at the time of the accident.

Hope fades for islander lost at sea

<http://www.capecodtimes.com/article/19991021/news01/310219977>

Oct 21, 1999

Shellfish warden Richard Madeiras is well-known on and off the Vineyard for his aquaculture expertise. STAFF WRITER OAK BLUFFS -- While volunteers scoured the beaches from Edgartown to Tashmoo yesterday for any sign of Oak Bluffs' missing shellfish warden, islanders began to mourn what more and more came to look like the loss of a friend.

On Tuesday, a jogger saw Richard Madeiras fall out of his boat 200 yards off East Chop. After clinging to the side of the boat for several minutes, he slipped beneath the surface.

Quickly set into motion was a massive search by dozens of volunteers, the police and fire departments and the Coast Guard. But by nightfall Tuesday, only Madeiras' hat had been found about 100 feet from where he was last seen.

"We were all holding out hope .as long as we could. But as today wore on, we've been slowly coming to grips with the fact that he's probably gone," Richard Combra Sr., a cousin of Madeiras said yesterday.

A candlelight service was held last night at Our Lady Star of the Sea Church in Madeiras' native Oak Bluffs. Grief counselors were also available yesterday in the schools where his children are students.

Madeiras, 44, is well-known on the island and respected both on and off the Vineyard as a specialist in shellfish propagation and aquaculture.

Friends and family say he was born to fish.

He worked the local waters but also fished on the big boats from Alaska to the Gulf of Maine.

In 1978 he was one of the first employees of the Martha's Vineyard Shellfish Group, a hatchery that provides shellfish seed to the island's shellfish wardens.

A decade later, he was made Oak Bluffs' shellfish warden. Like his work at the hatchery, he loved his job and thrived in it.

"He touched so many people. If some of the older folks couldn't get out to dig for quahogs, he'd make sure they get a half-bushel or something from him. He was an outstanding public servant who did a great job with a great deal of pride," said Combra, who also serves on the town's board of selectman.

And Madeiras was always trying to make Oak Bluffs shellfishery the best so local fishermen could get larger catches and better support their families.

At the time of the accident, he was checking the shellfish beds off East Chop so he could tell the commercial shellfishermen the best places to go.

"He always wanted Oak Bluffs to have the biggest harvest. He was always looking out for those guys," Richard Combra Jr., said.

The younger Combra saw Madeiras shortly before he went out on the water Tuesday. He, like many of Madeiras' friends, is trying to figure out what caused the mishap.

He speculates that Madeiras was dragging for scallops and his dredge got hung up on something, causing the boat to lurch and Madeiras to fall overboard.

The jogger who witnessed the accident told police the boat lurched to the side just as Madeiras was thrown overboard.

Another possibility is Madeiras' gear was stowed, but a dredge fell overboard and acted as a water anchor, suddenly slowing the boat.

Investigators, however, still have not determined what happened.

"It's speculation. That's all it is right now. We have no definitive answers," state Environmental police Sgt. William Searle said.

Whatever happened, Richard Combra Jr. said it was a fluke. Madeiras was one of the best boatmen around, he said.

"If someone were to ask me who on this planet I'd feel safest on the water with, it would be him," he said.

Searle said once the search is complete, an investigation into what caused the mishap will begin in earnest.

Oak Bluffs police Chief Joe Carter said the search will go on. Bad weather hampered searchers yesterday. Boats had to be called back to shore and a Coast Guard helicopter flew overhead for about 30 minutes before returning to its Cape Cod base.

Searchers set out again at first light today.

"This is typical of islanders to band together. You hate to have it be this that brings them out, but it's typical. They will work until they get the job done," Searle said.

Richard Combra Sr. said it is important to find Madeiras so the family can have a sense of closure.

He said the family was taking things as well as can be expected, but that they are devastated.

"The whole island is mourning this. He was a vibrant, wonderful guy," shellfish group director Rick Carney said.

Divers recover body of shellfish constable off Martha's Vineyard

http://www.boston.com/dailynews/296/region/Divers_recover_body_of_shellfi:.shtml

10/23/99 By Associated Press

OAK BLUFFS, Mass. (AP) The body of a shellfish constable who fell from his boat just off Martha's Vineyard was found Saturday by local fire department divers.

The body of Richard Madeiras, 44, was located at around 9:20 a.m., a few hundred yards from where Madeiras went overboard near the shoreline Tuesday, police Sgt. David Roberts said.

Madeiras wasn't wearing a life jacket nor did he have on hip waders, as a witness previously reported, Roberts said.

Roberts said both the cause of the fall and the drowning remained under investigation.

Madeiras was a longtime Oak Bluffs resident with a wife and two children. As shellfish constable, he helped maintain the area's shellfishing grounds. It wasn't clear if he was acting in his official capacity at the time of the accident

A PFD is the one piece of equipment that could save your life

<http://www.mvtimes.com/2010/09/01/pfd-one-piece-equipment-that-could-save-your-life-2440/>

September 1, 2010 By **Nelson Sigelman**

The summer crowds have melted away, the golfer-in-chief has departed, and Islanders are ready to get down to the serious business of preparing for the start of the 65th Martha's Vineyard Striped Bass and Bluefish Derby.

The Derby begins on Sunday Sept. 12 and ends Saturday Oct. 16. Fishermen will be spooling reels, sharpening hooks, and adding lures to their arsenals.

I recommend fishermen pay similar attention to their PFDs (personal floatation device). What is the difference between a PFD and a piece of fishing tackle? One could catch you a fish and the other could save your life.

I need to repeat a message I have delivered many times over the course of this fishing column. I have never included the word "inexperienced" in the many stories I have written about accidents on the water, and that includes those in which there was a tragic loss of life.

What is my point? Readers who think accidents on the water happen to other, less-experienced people are wrong. Readers who think accidents only happen in rough conditions and do not occur on protected waters are wrong.

Readers who think having a PFD at arm's length is sufficient are wrong.

I have an inflatable fishing vest. A tug of a cord pierces a CO2 cartridge and it inflates. I wear it on a boat and on the shore. Why? I was nearly pulled into the water by the backwash of a large wave that struck a jetty I was fishing on many years ago.

I was reminded of that frightening incident by the news that on Tuesday, Nicholas Roussos, 67, of Belmont died after he was swept off the rocks while fishing at Eastern Point in Gloucester.



Assistant Tisbury shellfish constable Fred Benson wears an inflatable SOSpenders PFD. — Photo by Nelson Sigelman

There are many types of PFDs on the market. Some are more comfortable than others but all can save a life — but only when they are worn. I think public officials need to set an example but not all do.

I have heard a number of excuses why. Working comfort, other people on the boat, small harbor with people around, but the reasons ring empty to me, and to those aware of the statistics and risks.

A Coast Guardsman on a dock or on the water wears a PFD whether the mission is law enforcement or the heavy work of buoy tending. Irrespective of other considerations, Island public officials have a responsibility to set a good example and in many cases follow policies that require PFD use.

I checked in with several towns about policies that require harbor and shellfish personnel to wear PFDs when on the water. "Absolutely, we have a policy on that," Aase Jones, assistant Tisbury town administrator, said. All Tisbury town employees in a boat are required to wear a PFD.

Tim Carroll, Chilmark town administrator, said the selectmen have twice reaffirmed a policy, and he has sent out multiple memos reminding town employees "that all town personnel must wear a Coast Guard-approved PFD when aboard town-owned boats or on town business."

Why is it important, I asked Tim. "First of all, to set a good example and second of all, anybody can fall overboard and Menemsha channel is fast-moving water and by the time someone got a chance to turn around you could have clunked your head on the side of something and be unconscious."

Charlie Blair, Edgartown harbormaster, requires no prodding or official guidance to wear a PFD. He embraces it.

"We wear the big hot ugly kind with the reflective tape," Charlie said when I reached him on the phone Tuesday. "The Stearns workvest, because we want people to see them."

Charlie said the exception is the pump-out attendant. He wears a fanny pack, a small inflatable PFD worn around the waist. "The police that ride along with us, they wear the SOSpenders because our jackets are too hot for our policeman."

On a day that broke 90-degrees, Charlie said, "We've been sweatin' to death in them today, but we wear 'em, we want to be visible, we want kids to see that we can wear jackets. We are the example to all the young kids."

Charlie said it is important. Once the kids see that, they can choose from a variety of comfortable vests on the market.

"The real secret is that once you wear one of these for a season, when you jump in a boat and you don't have one on, you feel naked, you feel weird," he said. "My two boys, they both swim, but even if the boat is tied to a dock they're not allowed on it without lifejackets on."

David Grunden, Oak Bluffs shellfish constable, said his department has a policy approved by the selectmen that varies depending on the season and environment. If a person is alone in a boat or when the water is below 60-degrees, a PFD is required. Working with someone in the pond, a PFD is not required.

Oak Bluffs has a poignant reminder in the herring run off Barnes Road, named for Mr. Grunden's predecessor, Richard Madeiras, who drowned after he fell out of a skiff off East Chop. He was not wearing a PFD at the time.

Oak Bluffs harbormaster Todd Alexander takes a case-by-case approach. He does not require his employees who collect mooring fees to wear a PFD in good weather within the harbor when there are two people in the boat, but notes PFDs are always in the boat. Employees alone in a boat are supposed to wear a PFD, but he admits that is not always the case.

I understand how easy it is to leave a PFD on the deck. Particularly, when someone is in a comfortable marine environment.

Over the summer, I passed the Dukes County Sheriff's boat on patrol in Island waters. By all accounts, the crew has provided valuable assistance to towns and boaters.

But whenever I have seen the boat the two crew members were not wearing PFDs. It is the wrong message to send to other boaters.

When the Menemsha Coast Guard station boathouse caught on fire one of the most dramatic photos showed harbormaster Denny Jason and crew Cody Gray in an inflatable against the backdrop of raging flames. Neither man was wearing a PFD.

Their quick action and bravery is without question. But the extra five seconds it would have taken to don a PFD could have saved their lives if there had been an explosion that knocked either man into the water.

This is not an argument about fishing tactics. There is really not much room for debate. PFDs need to be worn.

Found tackle bag

Eben Elias of West Tisbury walked into the Times Tuesday and handed me a tackle bag he found in Menemsha filled with several hundred dollars worth of lures and fishing equipment. Judging by the meticulous way the tackle is arranged it is obvious the bag belongs to a serious fisherman.

Eben did not say much to me but his actions reflect a lot about his character and honesty. Call me at 508-693-6100 or email nelson@mvtimes.com and identify the bag.