

## Exhibit 11 - College student drowns in pond

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Staff photo by Kevin Jacobus

Nashua firefighters and dive team members work at the scene in Bowers Pond in Merrimack, one of the Pennichuck Water Works reservoirs, where a Thomas More College student drowned Tuesday afternoon. [Order this photo](#)

MERRIMACK – A 22-year-old Thomas More College student drowned Tuesday while attempting to take an afternoon swim with a friend in Bowers Pond.

John Blonski, 22, of Neptune, N.J., was pronounced dead at 4:19 p.m. at Southern New Hampshire Medical Center, where he was transported by ambulance after members of the Nashua Fire Rescue Dive Team pulled his body onto the south

shore of the pond.

Blonski had been underwater about 40 minutes when he was found at the bottom of 13 feet of water, approximately 70 feet from shore, Nashua and Merrimack police officials said.

“It appears to be an accident,” Merrimack police Detective Dean KillKelly said, adding that the investigation is ongoing.

The incident happened at about 3 p.m. near the Bowers Pond Dam, which is accessed by a quarter-mile dirt road at the end of Osprey Lane in the Heron Cove subdivision.

The pond and surrounding land is owned by Pennichuck Water Works and access to the road is blocked by a metal gate marked with “No Trespass” signs.

Blonski’s friend and co-worker, Joseph Myers, 19, of Bow, also a student of the

college, had been swimming with Blonski at the time and called 911 after witnessing him go under the water in distress, police said.

Merrimack fire crews who were in the area were first to arrive at the scene and cut the lock to the gates to gain access to the dirt road, Merrimack Deputy Fire Chief Frank Fraitzl said.

After arriving at the pond, firefighters John Demyanovich and Shawn Kimball entered the water and attempted to locate Blonski, while Fire Capt. Larry Rothhaus requested help from Nashua Fire Rescue's Dive Team, Fraitzl said.

About 20 Nashua firefighters responded to the pond at about 3:20 p.m., some of whom were in the process of dive training when they were pulled out of class to go to the call, Nashua Assistant Fire Chief Michael Mansfield said.

A three-diver crew located Blonski approximately 10 minutes after entering the water, he said.

"He was obviously in full cardiac arrest. We pulled him from the water and advanced life support was immediately started . . . from both Merrimack and Rockingham ambulance units," Mansfield said.

Myers told Merrimack police that Blonski knew how to swim and had no obvious physical disabilities.

Although shaken, Meyers was not injured and was not transported to any hospital.

"He was obviously emotionally distraught from witnessing this," Mansfield said.

The two men were working summer jobs as grounds keepers at the local college

and had only known each other for about two weeks, Merrimack police Lt. Michael Dudash said.

Both had planned to swim across the pond after arriving to the area at about 2:30 p.m., he said.

Blonski, who was swimming behind Meyers, began having trouble within minutes of going into the water, Dudash said.

“(Blonski) was yelling for help and by the time (Meyers) got to him he was already underwater, Dudash said.

Meyers attempted to find Blonski but was unsuccessful, and swam to the shore and called 911, he said.

Mansfield said the water was very calm where Blonski’s body was found and although the area was relatively close to the dam, there wasn’t any type of strong undercurrent. The water was 64 degrees, he said.

He said a number of factors could have caused Blonski to have trouble swimming, such as muscle contractions caused by the difference in the air and water temperatures, anxiety or just becoming too tired.

“We don’t have any idea at this point. He just became winded and went below the surface of the water,” Mansfield said.

Police notified officials at the school shortly after the search for Blonski began, according to Mary Mumbach, dean of students.

News of Blonski’s death shocked the staff members of the small college, many

whom knew him, she said.

“He was very popular,” said Mumbach.

Mumbach, who teaches a writing workshop and literature classes at the school, said she got to know Blonski as one of her regular students.

“He really was just a hardworking, dedicated student and thoughtful person,” Mumbach said.

Blonski had just finished his sophomore year at the college and had recently returned from a school trip to Rome, Mumbach said.

He had transferred to the college as a seminary student and had recently declared philosophy as his major, she said.

Blonski, Meyers and another student were living in the school’s dormitory while working at the school.

The death is the first student death the college has experienced in its 27-year history, according to Mumbach.

Because the school only has classes in the fall and spring when the weather is cool, Mumbach said students using forbidden-area waters for swimming has never been much of a problem.

At 4:30 p.m. about 30 Nashua fire and Merrimack police officials were still milling around near the dam, collecting evidence and retrieving gear from the scene.

As the water passed through the concrete structure, Christopher Countie, water

supply manager for Pennichuck Water Works, stood nearby staring at the pond while talking on a cell phone.

Fire crews had called Countie to the scene to open all of the gates to the pond shortly after getting the 911 report, he said.

The pond is one of the reservoirs for Nashua and surrounding communities and is off limits to swimmers, he said.

“The area is clearly posted no trespassing,” Countie said, adding that the area is a known spot for kids to swim in the past.

“We’ve been aware of that and we will normally ask for help from Merrimack and Nashua police departments to help us with patrols,” he said.

Although all of the reservoirs are checked every morning, Countie said extra patrols are done during such stretches of hot weather.

Both Meyers and Blonski had entered the property by simply walking around the gate, police said, a common sight in hot weather according to Bob and Mildred Brogan, who live next door to the access road at 18 Osprey Lane.

Mildred Brogan said young people often drive to the area and park their cars at the end of the street before heading down to the pond.

“You get this warm weather and the kids are going to find the water,” Bob Brogan said.

The couple had just come home to find a fire engine parked in their driveway and were sipping glasses of ice tea in their garage, watching the crews work.

Numerous other fire apparatus lined the dead-end street and many of the other residents stood outside watching as well.

By that time, news of the drowning had already filtered through the neighborhood.

“It is sad because you know there is going to be some devastated parents somewhere,” Mildred Brogan said.

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Staff photo by Kevin Jacobus  
**Joseph Myers, 19, of Bow speaks to Merrimack police detective Denise Roy at the scene at Bowers Pond, one of the Pennichuck Water Works reservoirs, where a Thomas More College student drowned Tuesday afternoon. [Order this photo](#)**



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