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Caleb Acker

Caleb Acker, 22, son of former elementary principal,killed while snowboarding in Bridger Mountains

The news that Cedar Grove-Belgium High School graduate Caleb Acker died Monday in an avalanche while snowboarding in Montana was a shock to those who knew him.

Caleb, 22, moved to Cedar Grove when he was 18 months old and his father became principal of Cedar Grove-Belgium Elementary School. His mother Connie was a librarian, then director of the Cedar Grove Library, where Caleb used to go to storytimes.

Many people in the community watched the boy, his brother Josh and sisters Sarah and Grace grow up.

Caleb, who was a senior architecture student specializing in environmental design at Montana State University, died about 1 p.m. while snowboarding with a friend in Truman Gulch on the backside of Bridger Bowl Ski Area near Bozeman, Mont.

“His friend went down the hill first. He looked back for Caleb, and all he saw was snow,” Clay Acker said Tuesday. “Caleb had disappeared in the snow.”

The friend called 911 immediately and tried to find Caleb with his avalanche beacon.

Backcountry skiers and snowboarders have beacons on their boots that emit signals so they can be located in case of an avalanche, Acker said.

It took Gallatin County Search and Rescue volunteers and Bridger Bowl ski patrol members 30

minutes to get to the scene, he said. They found Caleb about 10 minutes later under more than five feet of snow.

Acker was told the avalanche was not big, but it was deep.

“They said he probably was killed by the impact of the snow,” Acker said.

“I never really thought about the danger because Caleb was so cautious and careful. I guess that wasn’t enough.”

The avalanche danger for the Bridgers was considered moderate Monday, which means natural occurring avalanches are not anticipated but human-triggered ones are still possible, according to Doug Chabot of the Gallatin National Forest Avalanche Center.

On the center’s Web site Tuesday, Chabot said the avalanche reportedly broke two to three feet deep, was 40 to 50 feet wide and ran at least 700 feet down the steep gully. The search and rescue team investigated the avalanche site Tuesday and will post an accident investigation report later in the week, Chabot said.

The two men were equipped with the proper gear, Gallatin County authorities said.

Cindy Kruis of Cedar Grove said Caleb and her sons Mark, 22, and Mike, 23, were inseparable while growing up.

“Caleb has been at my house since he was 18 months old,” she said. “The three of them were like peas in a pod. They did everything together. He lived with us one summer when he combined peas for the cannery (Lakeside Foods in Belgium).”

Mark Kruis has photos of when he and Mike visited Caleb in Montana and hiked through the mountains.

“It’s beautiful out there. He really loved it there, and so did we,” Mark said. “We talked often. Last year when I was in Montana for a training session, he and I went to Yellowstone. He was like a brother.”

The Ackers moved to Alberton, Mont., in 2008, a year after Caleb entered the University of Montana in Missoula.

An obituary for Caleb can be found on the obituary page.