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http://www.ozaukeepress.com/images/101812/tylerSM.png**Uncle of teenager who drowned articulates mission as Port waterfront safety committee begins work**

When Port Washington’s new waterfront safety committee met last week for the first time, members were almost immediately reminded why they were there.

Jim Buczek, whose 15-year-old nephew Tyler drowned off the city’s north beach Sept. 2, was emotional as he told the roughly two dozen people gathered at First Congregational Church that his family doesn’t want anyone else to experience a tragedy like they have.

“I’ve lived in Port Washington my whole life. Every summer, I did exactly what Tyler did — the bigger the wave, the more fun we had,” Buczek said. “If we can save just one life in memory of Tyler...

“We want the water to be safe for everyone. We want Tyler to be remembered.”

He and his wife Tracy have talked about erecting a sign describing what happened at the entrance to the north beach, Buczek said.

“Not only would it be in his memory, it will be a reminder to people, ‘My gosh, this happened before. Let’s make sure it doesn’t happen again,’” he said. “I know it would mean a lot to our family.”

Mayor Tom Mlada said that Tyler’s death touched the entire community, and now the community needs to create a comprehensive response.

“We can’t legislate the risk out of everything, but we want our beaches, our waterfront, to be the safest place they can be,” he said.

The city shouldn’t just focus on the north beach, but instead look at its entire waterfront, said Kevin Rudser.

“We have to keep in mind there are multiple places we can get ourselves in trouble,” he said, noting the waterfront extends from the north beach to the south beach, including Rotary Park, the breakwater and coal dock.

Members of the committee — which includes representatives from the Port Washington-Saukville School District, Feith Family Ozaukee YMCA, service clubs and city government, as well as interested citizens — talked about how Tyler’s death impacted them.

“Prevention is where it’s at. I’m sick and tired of going out and doing what we’re doing,” Ozaukee County Emergency Government Director Mark Owen said.

Several members said they have people waiting to find out what they can do to help ensure another young person doesn’t lose his life.

Boy Scout Max Noll, who said he was on the beach the day Tyler drowned, said he wants to select a waterfront safety project as his Eagle Scout project.

The city doesn’t need to reinvent the wheel, Mlada said, adding the committee should come up with recommendations to present to the Common Council for implementation by next summer.

“There are a lot of lakefront communities,” he said. “Let’s learn from what others are doing, make recommendations and move forward. There’s a sense of urgency in our work.”

The committee focused its efforts in defining four areas to consider — signs and safety equipment, education and programs, fundraising and memorials — brainstorming to create a long list of potential projects.

In the area of signs and safety equipment, the list included everything from installing 911 call boxes to adding signs to warn people about rip currents and tell them how to swim out of them.

“As a parent, I would love to have something at the lake telling me what to look for,” said Diane Johnson, principal of Dunwiddie Elementary School.

Others suggested an electronic sign that could be updated with warnings as they occur, a stoplight system or implementing a flag system that would warn swimmers of potential danger.

Brochures with information on the beach and rip currents, as well as potential danger spots, could be created and distributed to residents and area hotels and motels.

“We get so many people in town who just know they’re going to the beach on a sunny day,” Rudser said.

Barbara Bates-Nelson, a swim instructor, also suggested the city consider hiring lifeguards and creating a designated swim area, perhaps with buoys.

“If you’re chasing the waves, you’re not paying attention to how far out you’re being pulled,”

she said. “This would create a visual reminder.”

Throw rings and ladders should be installed on the breakwater, Ozaukee County Supr. Rick Nelson, chairman of the city’s Police and Fire Commission, said.

Education is an important part of their mission, committee members said. An annual town hall meeting on water safety aimed at parents and children was suggested, as well as a community-wide awareness program that could include newspaper inserts.

“We have fire safety week, tornado awareness week, why not a waterfront safety week?” asked Jen Clearwater, executive director of the Feith Family Ozaukee YMCA.

Short videos on water safety created by the Great Lakes Beach and Pier Safety Task Force could be shown before the city’s Friday Night Flicks movies, others suggested.

Nelson suggested that swimming lessons offered throughout the area include a day or two at the beach since open-water swimming is different than swimming in a pool. Others suggested a summer-school lake swimming class.

“We don’t want to scare people,” Mlada said. “You don’t need to fear the water, you need to respect the water.”

Memorial ideas included scholarships and the creation of a covered seating area where families can gather on the beach.

The committee broke into groups to focus on the four study areas in November, then will meet again at 6:30 p.m. Dec. 5.

Mary Ann Voigt, owner of the Dockside Deli where Tyler worked and his mother still works, said the committee may not be able to do everything it wants in one year.

“Maybe we do a few of these things in year one and build on that,” she said.

Image Information: PLACING A LARGE CHAIN LINK engraved with their son Tyler’s name, the dates of his birth and death and the motto “Play hard, play smart, play with heart” on the anchor at the Port Washington High School athletic field were Kim and Joe Buczek. Tyler, a gifted athlete, drowned in Lake Michigan on Sept. 2. His link will serve as a transition between the anchor and individual links engraved with the name of each senior football player. Tyler’s link,

as well as those for this year’s senior players, were installed during Senior Night activities before last Friday’s football game against Grafton.

Photo by Sam Arendt