

HERO'S DEATH

Man drowns trying to rescue boy after canoe flips on Half Moon Lake

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DEXTER — A Garden City man "died a hero's death" Saturday while trying to save a 12-year-old neighbor boy's life when their canoe capsized on Half Moon Lake in Dexter Township.

Drowned while making repeated dives to find the youth after the canoe overturned was 39-year-old Thomas James Sloan. The boy, a nonswimmer, was plucked from the water and dragged to safety by other boaters.

Sloan reportedly made several dives, each time pushing the youth's head above water. Just as the youth was rescued, Sloan sank beneath the surface and drowned, according to deputies from the Washtenaw County Sheriff's Department who investigated circumstances surrounding the 6:50 p.m. canoe accident.

"There's no doubt that the victim sacrificed his own life for that of the boy," said Deputy Carl Werner. "He died a hero's death."

According to police accounts of the drowning, Sloan and the neighbor youth had been on a day-long fishing trip in a canoe powered by an outboard motor.

The youth, who was steering the canoe, shut off the motor after its propellor became fouled by weeds. Both of them removed their movement-restricting life preservers so they could more easily reach the weeds, deputies said.

Sloan, who had rigged an extension to the motor's pull cord so that he could start it from the front of the canoe, gave the cord a yank. The engine was in gear, and the canoe, which was being tossed by waves from passing boats, lurched forward and flipped, tossing both occupants into the water.

"The deceased immediately swam to the aid of the driver who could not swim," said a department press release. "For approximately one minute, the deceased kept diving under the driver and pushing the driver above the water for air.

"The deceased did this until he could no longer come up for air himself."

Deputies from the sheriff's Marine Division and divers from the department's Underwater Rescue and Recovery Team recovered Sloan's body less than 90 minutes later. Sloan was pronounced dead on arrival at University Hospital.