

Sheriff: Mortuary should not have ID'd drowning victim

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By **Brandon Macz of the Tribune**

ASOTIN - Asotin County Sheriff Ken Bancroft chastised Merchant Funeral Home for its release Monday of a death notice identifying a man who drowned near Buffalo Eddy on the Snake River south of Asotin on Saturday.

The death notice identified the man as Rolando Gonzalez, 27, of Anatone, but a police report submitted by Deputy Jeff Polillo states identification taken from the body identified him as Mario A. Zendejasmarin, 31.

Bancroft said Merchant should not have sent the notice, because the sheriff's office was still attempting to determine the man's real name. He added witnesses were also providing conflicting stories.

According to Merchant Funeral Home, Rolando Gonzalez is the correct name of the man who drowned on Friday night, and was confirmed with family members in Mexico and with the coroner.

Deputy Prosecutor Joseph Jackson is acting as coroner on this case, but declined to confirm a name until later this week when a family member could give a positive, visual identification. He said this was out of respect for the family.

"A family member will have to make a confirmation," Jackson said. "We're being cautious in releasing information."

The report submitted by Polillo states "Zendejasmarin" was recovered from the Snake River about 30 yards from the shoreline around 9:20 p.m. Saturday by Sgt. Jay Colvin, marine supervisor for the Nez Perce County Sheriff's Office. Both agencies responded. Gonzalez had been in the water for more than an hour.

"From what I hear, Buffalo Eddy isn't the safest place to be swimming," Bancroft said. "It could be he wasn't familiar with the area."

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