

SM snowmobiler killed in avalanche



T.J. Grieser

By Chris D'Angelo

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Funeral services for the St. Maries man killed in an avalanche near Superior, Mont. over the weekend are Saturday.

Twenty-nine year old T.J. Grieser was snowmobiling with a group of family and friends around 6 p.m. Saturday in a basin near Missoula Lake in the Lolo National Forest when the accident occurred.

The area is located approximately 20 miles southwest of Superior on the Montana-Idaho border.

"One member of the group was at the bottom of the basin (near Oregon Peak) and three members were on top of a ridge when they started coming down one at a time," as stated in a press release from the Mineral County Sheriff's Office. "The victim (Mr. Grieser) was the last of the three to come down the mountain and, according to witnesses at the bottom of the hill, the avalanche started as he was coming down the hill."

Witnesses including the victim's father, uncle and a close friend stated that Mr. Grieser appeared to have noticed that the avalanche had started and attempted to ride it out.

Mr. Grieser was caught and carried approximately 800 feet, strained through trees and buried under approximately four feet of snow, according to preliminary information released by missoulaavalanche.org.

The three members of the party who were on scene immediately began searching for Mr. Grieser using avalanche beacons.

"Approximately five minutes after they began searching they located the victim and dug him out of the snow," the press release stated. "The members of the party attempted CPR but they were not able to revive the victim."

The avalanche occurred on an approximately 6,200-foot, northwest facing slope which had been exposed to direct sunlight for several hours, causing snow to weaken. The crown of the avalanche was estimated to be between two and two and a half feet deep and between 300 and 400 feet across, according to missoulaavalanche.org.

Superior Ambulance services and the Mineral County Search and Rescue were in route to assist in the rescue when they were met by Mr. Grieser's party as they were coming down

from the mountain.

Mr. Grieser was a 1999 graduate of St. Maries High School. He was married to Ananda Harper Grieser in January 2005. Ms. Grieser is expecting their first child this summer.

Ms. Grieser's mother, Robin Jones, has set up a college fund for Mr. and Ms. Grieser's child at U.S. Bank in St. Maries. The family requests donations to the account in lieu of flowers.

"I really lucked out having him as a son-in-law," Ms. Jones said Monday as tears began to fill her eyes. "He was a genuinely nice man, one of the very few."

Above all, Ms. Jones says she will always remember Mr. Grieser's kindness, loyalty and wonderful sense of humor.

"I don't know anybody that ever met him that didn't like him," she said. "The whole town is just shocked."

One friend of Mr. Grieser, Travis Turner, recently created a Facebook group to remember his lost friend. In just the few days it has been up, the group has grown to over 400 members, many of whom have left messages of memories and support for his family and friends.

"It is very rare that you meet a person like T.J.," wrote Mr. Turner on the Facebook page. "Even one time and you would remember him forever. T.J. was a great man and hated no one. If you were a friend of his, you will be forever. He will be greatly missed."

It is clear that Mr. Grieser not only touched those closest to him, but nearly everyone he encountered.

"T.J. was such a kind person. Regardless of whether you were in the 'in crowd' or not, whether you had seen him yesterday or 10 years ago, he always seemed happy to see you," wrote Amanda Beckner. "His smile and personality were so infectious."

The Facebook group for Mr. Grieser can be found at <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=112766092073416&ref=search&sid=23503901.1275376047..1>.

Funeral services for Mr. Grieser will be at 2 p.m. Saturday at the St. Maries Church of the Nazarene gymnasium, with Father Timothy Ritchey officiating. Those interested in seeing Mr. Grieser one final time are encouraged to visit Hodge Funeral Home today (Wednesday) from 1 to 5 p.m. for viewing.

To donate to the college fund for Mr. and Ms. Grieser's child contact U.S. Bank at 245-2574.