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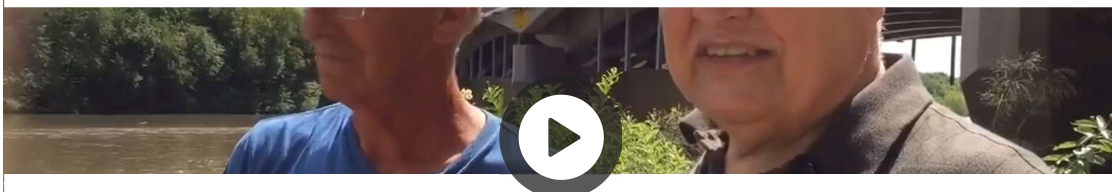
Families of dam drowning victims urge more warning signs

BY KELSEY RYAN

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UPDATED SEPTEMBER 03, 2016 3:35 PM

Brothers of dam drowning victim want more warning signs



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HD

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It's been 37 years since Tim and Dave Abbott visited the 21st Street dam.

The last time, emergency workers tried to find their younger brother, Andy Abbott, 21, whose canoe capsized on the Arkansas River.

The similarities between what happened in 1979 and what happened to a group of kayakers in July – when [seminarian Brian Bergkamp drowned at the same dam](#) – are striking.

A group of young adults. Recent rains causing churning water. Drowning deaths in the strong reverse currents caused by the dam. Bodies found far downstream by Herman Hill Park.

Those similarities bring up memories for the families.

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Andy Abbott had gone on a canoe trip in March 1979 with three friends: Michael Standfast, 23; Leslie Schauvliege, 22; and Bradley Berschauer, 21.

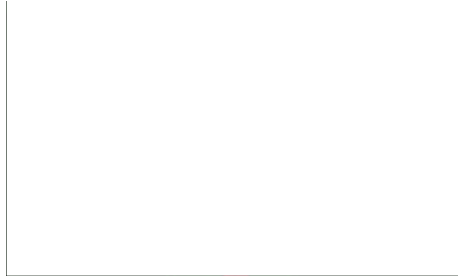
The four men put their two rented aluminum canoes in the Arkansas River at 109th Street North. They planned to paddle until Herman Hill Park, where there was a concert that day.

A few hours later, when they reached the 21st Street dam, both canoes capsized.

Standfast and Schauvliege made it to shore.

Berschauer was trapped in the swirling water for about 20 minutes. He was later found and pulled to shore, where emergency workers attempted to resuscitate him. He was pronounced dead at the hospital.

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Abbott went missing. Nearly three months later, his body was pulled out of the water near Herman Hill Park – where he had parked his silver El Camino for he and his friends to ride home in from the concert.

Berschauer was a painter. He had a wife and young daughter. His family tried to sue the city, but nothing came of it.

Abbott had been a football player at Bishop Carroll, tall and strong. He was a meticulous carpenter with long dark hair.

Small signs on the bridge above the dam – then and now – warn people to stay back 150 feet.

But family members of those who drowned in 1979 say the signs – now older and hard to read – are not enough.

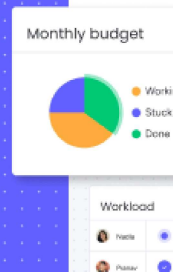
“They need to put more signs up to warn of the danger,” said Wilma Berschauer, Bradley Berschauer’s mother. “That might discourage them getting on the river, especially when there’s high water.”

Tim and Dave Abbott say more visible signs should be put up. The signs today are basically the same as when their brother drowned. Perhaps there are other safety measures that could be taken, but they’re not sure what.

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“I think something ought to be done before someone else dies,” said Tim Abbott, staring out at the churning water.

“It’ll happen again if nothing changes.”

Contributing: Amy Leiker of The Eagle

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