

#### **NEWS**

# Man and his mother drown in Swatara Creek while fishing at low-head dam

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Jonestown dam low-head dam on Swatara Creek









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The two people who died after they were <u>pulled from the Swatara Creek</u> Sunday in Lebanon County were a mother and son, according to a <u>GoFundMe</u> created by the family.

Salvador Jimenez, 42, and Ivette Santiago, 61, were two of the four people struggling in the creek, prompting a rescue situation Sunday evening near the Jonestown dam in Jonestown Borough, Pennsylvania State Police said.

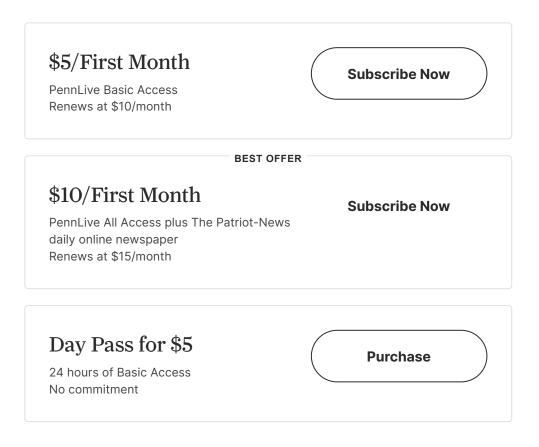
The group was standing on top of the dam to fish, according to Jon Beers, executive director of the Lebanon Water Authority, which uses the dam for Lebanon's drinking water.

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The deaths come less than two years after a 31-year-old man drowned at the dam while kayaking.

Jimenez was taken to Good Samaritan Hospital in Lebanon and pronounced dead, state police said. Santiago was in critical condition when she was taken to Penn State Hershey Medical Center, but the Dauphin County Coroner's Office said she has since died.

The coroner's office said Santiago's death was ruled accidental as a result of fresh water drowning. The Lebanon County Coroner's Office could not be reached for Jimenez' cause of death.

The other two people rescued from the water had only minor injuries, according to state police.

Jimenez's son and Santiago's grandson launched a <u>GoFundMe</u> to help the family pay for their funerals. The campaign has raised more than \$8,000 toward its \$15,000 goal as of Tuesday afternoon.

"This was a very random, horrible incident that has our whole family working together to get through. Anything helps, thank you so much," Salvador Jimenez Jr wrote.

The dam north of Jonestown is one of two dams on the Swatara Creek in Lebanon County. Low-head dams can appear harmless under certain conditions but the churning waters created by the dam are so dangerous they are known as "drowning machines."

Bethany Canner, president of the Swatara Watershed Association, said it is not unheard of for people to get too close and trapped in the dam's swift-moving waters.

Canner told PennLive the area is well-marked with signs and buoys warning visitors of the nearby dam and its dangers. There is also a fence on one side of the creek near the Lebanon Valley Rail-Trail. More signage was added after the June 2020 drowning, Canner said.

Some of the signs advise boaters to exit the water and re-enter after the dam and there is an area for "portage," she said.

The dam has been there since 1910. There have been four drownings in five years, according to Beers.

"I feel bad about it but I don't have an answer about how this could all be resolved just yet," Beers said. "They look very innocent...even experienced kayakers can get caught up in that."

Removing the dam could mess up the water supply, Beers said, but "we're going to have a lot of conversations" with local and state officials about who owns the dam and should be maintaining it.

In the latest drowning, Beers said the people fishing went through private property to access the dam and either didn't see or ignored the warning signs.

"People certainly have a right to be on the creek but they had to go through private property to get to the dam," Beers said.

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