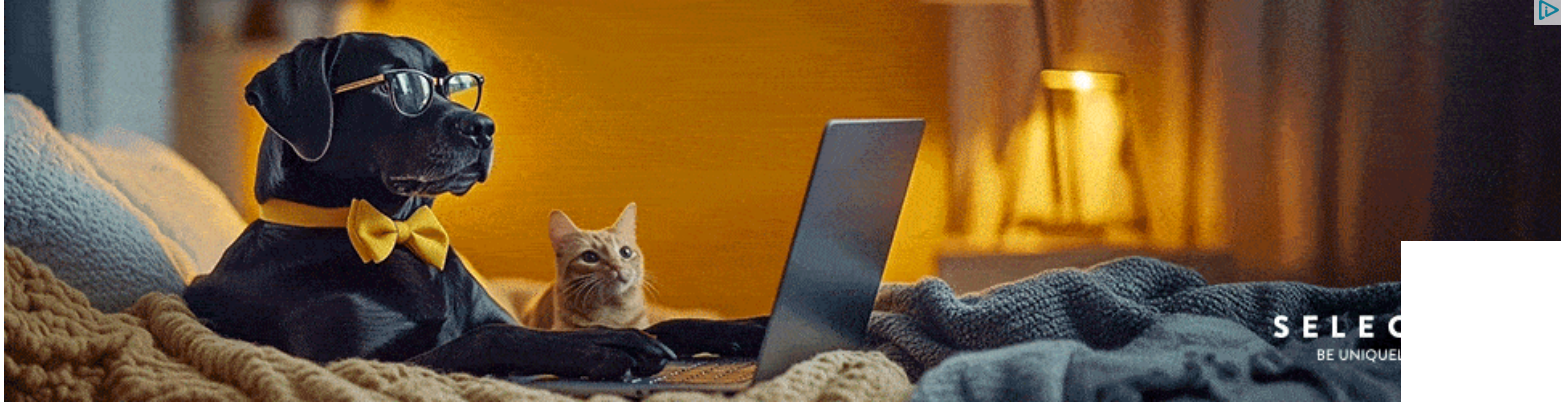


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#### GRAND RAPIDS

## Man killed in Grand River scuba diving accident remembered as 'answer guy,' preservationist

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Bob Shoemaker



By [John Tunison | jtunison@mlive.com](mailto:jtunison@mlive.com)

GRAND RAPIDS, MI - In the next few months, Bob Shoemaker planned to pursue his dream.

He was going to open a scuba shop - a place that eventually could expand into an "adventure" store for all types of recreation.

"He was finally going to go after it," said Derek Wheeler, a longtime friend of Shoemaker. "We all knew he could do it,"

Friends of Shoemaker, killed in a Grand River diving accident Saturday near Fish Ladder Park, say they'll remember his enthusiasm for life and focus on conservationism and nature.

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Shoemaker, 29, was a recreationist at heart and spent many hours outdoors - hunting, kayaking, mountain biking and fishing.

Moreover, he was a good friend to many.

"Everybody loved Bob. He was just a fun guy," said Wheeler, who had known Shoemaker since the second grade.

"He was my answer guy. If I had a problem, he's just the person I would call. He would always have advice for me," Wheeler said.

Shoemaker was diving about 10:40 a.m. Saturday with Wheeler and another friend when he became trapped in the currents and turbulent water near the Sixth Street dam. When firefighters pulled him out, he could not be revived.

Shoemaker was an experienced diver who trained and "certified" many others to dive.

He was surveying underwater areas near the dam to help further [the Grand Rapids Whitewater project](#), a \$27 million proposal to remove the downtown dams and restore rapids to the river.

He had already been diving in the area in late July without incident.

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Wheeler and the other diver were there Saturday morning to assist him and "keep an eye on him."

At some point, Shoemaker began to struggle and the two other divers could not reach him. They called 911.

**Related:** [Man dies in Fish Ladder Park scuba diving accident, police say](#)

"He was just kind of tumbling around in the water," a devastated Wheeler said. "The currents were just too tough. We just couldn't reach him. It was terrible.

"I think it was just the wrong spot he got into," he said.

The Whitewater project was something close to Shoemaker's heart, friends said. He wanted to be part of an effort that would help sturgeon and other fish be more productive.

"It was going to affect the fish and it was going to help the river," Wheeler said.

Jeff Haveman, another close friend of Shoemaker, met Shoemaker in 2008 when he taught Haveman and his son how to dive. Later, he taught Haveman's wife and daughter.

"You could tell he had a passion for the sport," Haveman said.

Outside of recreation, Shoemaker also took part in church activities and had spent time on a service project in Kentucky to fix homes.

Haveman and Shoemaker often did dives together - in the Straights of Mackinac and off the North Carolina coast - to name just two.

Shoemaker was classified as an advanced diving instructor and, at one point, had been the host of Talking Scuba, a locally produced Internet program about diving.

Haveman and Shoemaker frequently hung out together as friends.

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"He was going to be a lifelong friend. He just cared about people," Haveman said. "I'm going to miss him and I'm hurting from this.

"He was going to make an impact in the world. I'm sad," he said.

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