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Teen who drowned remembered for 'heart, humor, passion'

Tommy Gardner | Staff Writer

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Benjamin Jeremy Clapp

A teenager who drowned in the Lamoille River while swimming near the Morrisville village hydroelectric dam was an incoming high school freshman whose family said he “lived each of his 14 years with heart, humor, and fierce passion.”

Benjamin Clapp, 14, of Wolcott, was swimming with a friend last Wednesday, Aug. 7, below the dam on B Street, just down the hill from the heart of Morrisville’s downtown. According to police, **Clapp went missing in the turbulent waters**, despite his friend’s efforts to rescue him. A bystander also saw Clapp struggling in the water and called police.

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Tommy Gardner | Staff Writer

Multiple agencies searched for Clapp until their efforts were cut short by darkness, although many stayed near the scene overnight. The next morning at daybreak, the search began anew, and Clapp was found about 60 yards downstream, Morristown police chief Jason Luneau told television crews posted outside the police department.

The sense of grief hanging in the air around town has been palpable for the past week from parents with kids in Morrisville schools — All Saints Academy, formerly Bishop Marshall School, where Clapp attended elementary school; and Peoples Academy, where he attended middle school and was less than a month from starting high school.

“There’s just a cloud of sadness right now,” Superintendent Ryan Heraty said.



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Heraty said Peoples Academy immediately, on Friday, opened the school gymnasium so Clapp's friends and family and school community could grieve and console one another. Much of the eighth-grade teaching team was there, both to give and receive support — they had just spent a year with Clapp.

“We’re a small school, so you really know every child really well, and he had really strong connections with the teachers and his peers,” Heraty said.

The consoling will not be just a single afternoon in August. Heraty said school counselors will be standing by to tend to students’ needs as the new school year begins with one empty seat in class.

“For a lot of our students, this is the first peer that they’ve lost in their friend group, and that’s a really hard thing to navigate,” he said. “So, we’ve got to keep a really close eye on our community right now. But, you know, I think the strength of our tight knit community is that we rally together.”

According to **Clapp’s obituary**, the 14-year-old was a multi-sport athlete who participated in hockey, skiing, golf, baseball, soccer and basketball. But he was perhaps best known for his soccer acumen, and for his good sportsmanship. Clapp was looking forward to going to Europe next year with the Morrisville Soccer Club, which makes the international trips frequently.

“He was a joy to watch play as he had a self-assurance, grace, and a god given ability to know where the ball was at all times, as well as an uncanny sense to know his opponent’s next move,” his obituary reads.



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