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Members of the Coatesville Fire Department carry the body of Mario Scamuffa, a plumber and volunteer fireman, from the Schuylkill. Scamuffa slipped and fell on ice near the Black Rock Dam during a Thanksgiving morning fishing trip, and a friend had tried in vain to save him. Divers could not recover his body until yesterday because of a strong undertow in the river.

Divers retrieve drowning victim's body from Schuylkill

Volunteer firefighter Mario Scamuffa had fallen into the river on Thanksgiving Day.

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INQUIRER STAFF WRITERS

MONT CLARE — As the search of the Schuylkill for Mario Scamuffa's body went into the sixth day, his girlfriend took comfort in a prayer that the Coatesville volunteer fireman often said to St. Anthony when items were lost.

Jennifer Stone recited an adaptation of the prayer several times yesterday as she waited by the riverbank. "St. Anthony, St. Anthony, please come down. Mario's been lost and can't be found," she prayed.

A few hours later, her prayer was answered when rescuers found his body about 400 yards

downstream from the ledge near the Black Rock Dam where he slipped and fell on Thanksgiving Day.

Divers said Scamuffa's body had been trapped against the base of the dam by the churning waters since he fell. But the swirling undertow made retrieving it too difficult for divers.

Shortly before 1 p.m. yesterday, the river flow shifted and Scamuffa's body was jarred loose. Forty-five minutes later, with divers watching closely, the body floated free.

"It hurts a little more when it's one of your own," said Bob Monzer, coordinator of Chester

County Water Rescue.

Scamuffa, 36, had gone to the river with three friends on a fishing trip early Thanksgiving morning. He slipped on ice, and a friend jumped in to try to save him but couldn't because of the powerful undertow, police said.



Mario Scamuffa, 36, slipped while fishing on Thanksgiving morning.

Scamuffa is not the first to drown near Black Rock Dam. In May, a 36-year-old woman drowned there while trying to rescue her dog, which survived.

A well-known volunteer with several fire companies in Coatesville, Scamuffa worked as a plumber for F.H. Swisher Heating & Plumbing. His eighth-grade teacher at Coatesville

Catholic Regional School, Marianna Emanuele, remembered him as a good student who played Jesus in the annual Stations of the Cross pageant.

Just before 3:30 yesterday, members of the Coatesville Fire Department arrived at the rescue dock on the north bank of the Schuylkill where Scamuffa's body lay on a stretcher.

They gathered around the stretcher, took off their hats, and softly said a prayer. Then they draped the body with an American flag. With Scamuffa's family watching, the firemen carried the stretcher past them and lifted the corpse into a van bound for the morgue.

"I feel a lot better knowing that he's been found," Stone said. "I'm happy he's going to be coming home."

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