

Body of kayaker's would-be rescuer is recovered

By Stan DeLozier

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MARYVILLE — Rescue workers on Friday recovered the body of a Blount County man who drowned Thursday in rain-swollen Little River during a daring attempt to rescue a kayaker.

Sheriff James Berrong said the body of Ernest "Chip" Koella IV, 27, of Rockford was removed from the water about 10:30 a.m. Koella died trying to save Kyle David Tyree, 24, of Maryville, who became

trapped in the swirling water below an unused dam behind Rockford Manufacturing Co., a Koella family business.

Meanwhile, emergency personnel were still searching Friday for the body of a man who is presumed to have drowned in Little River at Peery's Dam near Walland.

Witnesses told deputies the man ignored warnings and swam into the fast-flowing river just above the dam. He was carried across the dam and was seen minutes later, bloody and clinging to a tree branch. However, he lost his grip and went

under the water.

Officers said witnesses told them the victim appeared intoxicated and was with three other people who fled after calling E-911.

In the accident at Rockford, Tyree and a companion, Phillip Jones, 25, also of Maryville, were kayaking on the river when they approached the dam from upstream, according to Blount County Deputy Charles Garner.

He said Jones and Tyree paddled to the river bank to assess the risk, and Tyree

decided to paddle over the dam.

But when the front end of the kayak went over the dam, it was pulled under water, and Tyree was trapped in the undertow.

Koella, who was a vice president at Rockford Manufacturing, and other employees saw what happened, and Koella prepared for the rescue attempt while emergency personnel were on the way, officers said.

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A rope was attached to Koella, and he began to swim across the river upstream from where Tyree was trapped.

"The plan was for him to swim across the river with the rope," said Berrong.

"He was going to attach it on the other side and let the slack drift down to the kayaker."

The sheriff said Koella became tired and was unable to swim all the way across the river.

He was swept over the dam, and the rope became tangled in a tree that was downed in the water, preventing those on the shore from pulling him to safety, Berrong said.

Among those who tried to save Koella was his father, Ernest Koella III.

A rope was attached to the

elder Koella, but the swift current carried him downstream away from his son, and he nearly drowned before those holding the rope pulled him to safety.

Berrong said that on Friday morning rescue workers had to tie a Sheriff's Department boat to a tree to keep it from being swept downstream before they could recover Koella's body.

Tyree's body was recovered Thursday night.

Tyree graduated from the University of Tennessee in May with a degree in communications and a minor in Russian. He had worked for several years at a Knoxville sports bar.

The family will receive friends from 9 to 11 a.m. today at McCammon-Ammons Funeral Home in Maryville with services to follow.

Because many of Tyree's relatives live in Middle Tennessee, the family also will receive friends from 9 to 11 a.m. Monday at Bills, McGaugh and Floyd Funeral Home in Lewis-

burg. Services will be at noon in Friendship Cemetery in Maury County.

The family suggests memorials be made to the Foothills Land Conservancy, 352 High St., Maryville.

Chip Koella received a bachelor's degree from Emory University in Atlanta in 1991 with a major in textile technology and management.

In 1993, he got a master's degree from North Carolina State University and won an award for the best thesis or dissertation that year.

Services will be at 2 p.m. Sunday, Aug. 4, at Grandview Cemetery in Maryville. A memorial service will be at 3 p.m. at New Providence Presbyterian Church, where Koella was a member.

The family will receive friends after the service at the church.

Memorial donations may be made to Friends of the Smokies or the American Cancer Society.