

Multiple 911 callers reported teen on bridge

Steve Orr Rochester Democrat and Chronicle USA TODAY NETWORK

Multiple 911 callers reported seeing a person now believed to be runaway student Trevyan Rowe on the edge of the Douglass-Anthony Memorial Bridge over the Genesee River Thursday morning.

Three motorists told the *Democrat and Chronicle* that they reported the dark-clothed person immediately, fearing the person could be hurt. Two of the witnesses say they saw the person on the outside of the railing and the third saw him climbing over it.

Though it's not clear the callers knew it, the edge of the bridge is just beyond the railing.

An unknown number of additional motorists also witnessed the event.

"I immediately called the police and reported it. I just knew that something was wrong. I saw his eyes. He was looking toward the cars. His eyes were wide. He looked scared," said Kimberly Abramow, who was eastbound on Interstate 490 near the eastern end of the bridge.

The calls were made shortly after 8 a.m. Thursday. Trevyan, a 14-year-old boy with autism, apparently walked away from his nearby school about 7:30 a.m.

His disappearance was not discovered and reported to Rochester police until 5:15 p.m. Thursday, however.

When city police began looking for clues to his whereabouts, they apparently did not make the connection to the rash of urgent 911 calls hours earlier.

A State Police sergeant did, however, and reported the possible connection to the city-run 911 center Friday morning.

What was done with that report isn't yet known. But it was not until Saturday, after some of the witnesses made repeated calls to authorities, that the witnesses say city investigators began to look into the bridge episode in earnest.

A body later identified as Trevyan's was pulled from the Genesee River on Sunday afternoon, a few dozen yards from the spot where he may have plunged into the river Thursday morning.

Authorities have said police responded to numerous possible sightings of Trevyan from Thursday evening on, and had to check on all of them.

But the several thousand volunteers who searched for him Friday, Saturday and Sunday might have been spared a period of anguish.

"We're sick over it. Our hearts go out to the family. The people that helped — I feel bad that they had to spend days out in the cold," said witness Stacy Zoccali. "There would have been closure sooner."

A spokesman for the Rochester Police Department declined to comment Monday morning. The city-run 911 center also declined to release a log of 911 calls from Thursday morning.

A spokesman for the State Police said two troopers answered dispatches from the 911 center Thursday morning and found nothing.

One trooper happened to drive by about 8:10 a.m. and radioed in that no pedestrians were on the bridge. The trooper responding to the call arrived at 8:17 a.m. and similarly saw nothing, according to Trooper Mark

O'Donnell, a spokesman for the police agency.

A recording of 911 radio traffic Thursday morning, available online, includes an exchange in which a dispatcher notes the most recent caller had said the person was outside the guardrail.

"Do you want me to start fire?" the dispatcher said, a reference to the practice of sending firefighters to calls of people in the river.

The recording does not include an intelligible response. But the Rochester Fire Department did not respond to the scene Thursday, spokesman Amon Hudson said.

O'Donnell, who on Monday reviewed transcripts of the 911 calls, said troopers did not take any of the information from dispatchers to mean that the person appeared to be about to jump or fall from the bridge. Had any of them said that, the response would have been more robust, he said.

In fact, O'Donnell said troopers respond regularly to reports of pedestrians on the Douglass-Anthony bridge, which some consider a convenient, if highly dangerous, river crossing.

"We get dozens and dozens and dozens of those yearly ... because it's a shortcut," said O'Donnell, who used to patrol the area himself.

The walkers usually have disappeared by the time troopers arrive, he said.

O'Donnell also said Monday he had learned that an observant sergeant in the State Police Rochester station saw and heard descriptions of Trevyan on Friday morning and remembered the bridge reports.

"He put two and two together and said, 'Hey, that matches the description,' " said O'Donnell, who declined to release the sergeant's name.

The sergeant called the 911 center to report the possible connection between 10 and 11 a.m. Friday, O'Donnell said.

He then went to the regional traffic operations center, which shares the same Scottsville Road building with the State Police station, to inquire whether they had camera footage of the Thursday morning incident.

Regrettably, O'Donnell said, the video is kept only 24 hours and the sergeant's inquiry was too late.

Rochester Police Chief Michael Ciminelli alluded to the bridge episode at a media briefing Sunday night, but said it hadn't been confirmed that the person seen there was Trevyan.

However, the three motorists interviewed by the *D& C* say they, as well as co-workers who also saw the person, now are sure it was Trevyan. They recognized him after they'd seen surveillance photos and read descriptions of the clothes he was wearing — a black hooded coat, a dark sweatshirt, blue jeans and red sneakers.

"When I heard about the boy missing on the news, it briefly clicked in my head: 'Gosh, I hope that wasn't him.' Then Friday afternoon, a co-worker showed me a picture and what he was wearing. That's when I knew it was him," said Zoccali, who works at MVP Healthcare near the location where she saw the person on the bridge.

Zoccali, Abramow and a third motorist who did not want his name published all were headed east on I-490 in downtown Rochester.

They were at the east end of the Douglass-Anthony bridge, which carries I-490 over the river, near the start of the South Avenue exit ramp, when they noticed a person dressed in dark clothes near the edge of the span.

The third motorist, who was driving to Victor, Ontario County, saw the person stepping over the railing on the right-hand side of the road. Zoccali and Abramow, who had slowed to exit on the South Avenue ramp, saw the

pedestrian outside the guardrail on a narrow space that is above the edge of the river.

Zoccali said the person seemed to be in the process of sitting down.

Both she and the third witness said they initially thought they might have seen a homeless person. Homeless people are common in that part of downtown, and some live under highway bridges there.

They both concluded later that that was not what they'd seen, however.

The location is a 1 1/2-mile walk down South Avenue from School 12 at 999 South Ave. Trevyan was seen on a surveillance camera walking away from the building on South Avenue about 7:30 a.m. Thursday.

It is possible for a pedestrian to walk to the north end of South Avenue and go unimpeded up the exit ramp from I-490.

Abramow, who also works at MVP Healthcare, said another co-worker who came to work a few minutes earlier than she did saw a pedestrian moving up the ramp.

“He probably ran up the South Avenue ramp the wrong way and wound up on the bridge,” Abramow said. “He was autistic. He was probably scared by all the cars.”

All three witnesses said they made one or more follow-up calls to 911 or to Crimestoppers after they realized the person they saw may well have been Trevyan.

They said they got no reaction until Saturday, when a city police investigator visited each of them to go over what they'd seen.

Zoccali said the investigator seemed “really on top of it and genuinely concerned.”

She met the investigator on the riverbank Sunday afternoon as two boatloads of city and Monroe County sheriff's scuba team members searched the river and verified the location to them.

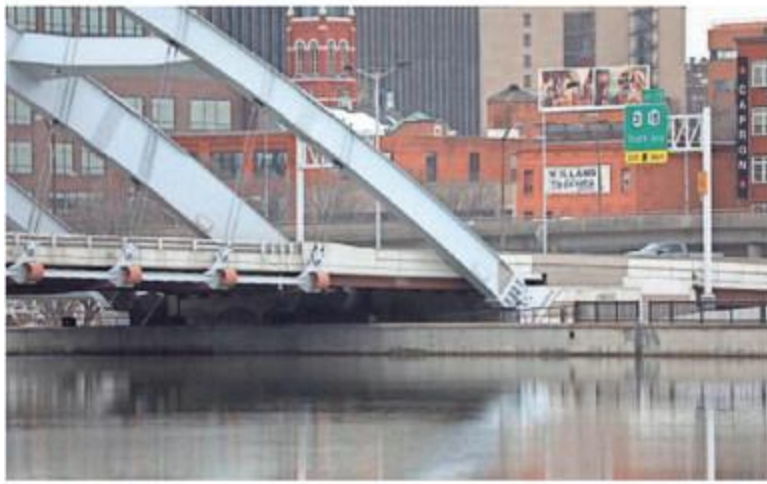
Trevyan's body was located shortly thereafter near the east bank of the river just north of the bridge around 4 p.m. Sunday.

Several of the witnesses said stopping on a busy expressway during rush hour would have been difficult and dangerous, but they still wonder what would have happened had they been able to do so.

“What would have changed if we did stop? We could have scared him. He could have fallen in. If we had gotten closer, he could have pulled us in,” Zoccali said.

“My head's spinning from it all. I feel in a strange way blessed that I did see it, and did have the notion to call. Because Kim and I were there, and because we pursued it, at least for the grace of God there is closure for the family,” she said.

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Several 911 callers reported seeing someone described as Trevyan Rowe on the Frederick Douglass-Susan B. Anthony Memorial Bridge. TINA MACINTYRE-YEE/ @TYEE23/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER