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VOL. 40 • N<sup>o</sup>. 1

MANOTICK, ONTARIO

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FRIDAY JANUARY 12, 2024

## Two teens die in Rideau River tragedy in Manotick

BY CHARLIE SENACK

The community is continuing to mourn the loss of two teens who drowned after falling through the ice on the Rideau River in Manotick Dec. 27,

While four teens went through the ice near Nicolls Island Road, a 17-year-old male was able to make it out of the frigid waters alive and save his 15-year-old sister. While both had to be treated for mild hypothermia, the brother was able to run to a nearby house where a neighbour called 911.

In darkness, police searched the river by raft for hours looking for signs of the missing teens. The body of 17-year-old Ahmed Ahmed, also known as Ahmed Haitham, was pulled from the water at around 4:00 a.m. in the morning. The next evening, the body of 16-year-old Riley Cotter was found after an extensive

search using robotic devices. Both teens were from Barrhaven and attended John McCrae Secondary School.

A GoFundMe page set up to help Ahmed's family cover funeral costs said he went out skating with three of his friends.

"He only took a few steps on the ice and unfortunately the ice broke," the GoFundMe read. "Ahmed and his friends fought for their lives wearing heavy winter pants and jackets, with heavy skates trying to swim in pitch black darkness."

The search for Cotter was stalled for part of the day on Dec. 27 after a police officer suffered "diving-related injuries." The diver was listed in serious condition initially, but is said to be recovering well.

In a statement Ottawa Police said their thoughts went out to the victims' families.



Emergency workers lined Nicolls Island Road as emergency workers searched for a teen who fell through the ice Dec. 27. Two Barrhaven teens, Ahmed Haitham and Riley Cotter, drowned after falling through the thin Rideau River ice while skating.

CHARLIE SENACK PHOTO

"We extend our deepest condolences to the families, friends, and all those af-

ected by this tragic loss," Ottawa Police said in a post on the platform X, formally

known as Twitter. "This incident profoundly impacts us all, and our hearts go out

to those who are grieving."

**TRAGEDY**  
continues on page 4

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**TRAGEDY** continues from page 1

Barrhaven East councillor Wilson Lo expressed his “heartfelt sympathies” to the victims’ families on the platform X, formerly known as Twitter. He told the Manotick Messenger the city is looking into what can be done to strengthen education around ice safety.

“City staff will be reaching out and collaborating with Parks Canada to make that site [Long Island Park] specifically safer with signage and education through social media,” Lo said. “There is never a bad time to remind people of the dangers of thin ice, especially over flowing water like the Rideau River, and especially at night when you can’t really see what the ice looks like.”

Barrhaven West councillor David Hill also gave his condolences and said city staff and the Ottawa

Carleton District School Board offered any assistance they could give to the two teens’ families.

“It was devastating. It broke my heart to hear the news,” said Hill. “I’ve asked a few questions to city staff to see if there are further things we can do in terms of ice safety and prevention.”

Ottawa has been dealing with above seasonal temperatures which led to a green Christmas. This week there were five straight days of temperatures above 0 C as an El Niño keeps the water warm.

Many parts of the Rideau River near where the teens drowned had open water with some areas being covered in a thin layer of ice. Neighbours who live in the area said just a few days ago almost the entire river was blanketed



Ottawa police are urging local residents to be cautious in the ice and to make sure it is thick enough for skating, snowmobiling or ice fishing before venturing out on the Rideau. CHARLIE SENACK PHOTOS

in ice.

Safety officials are urging everyone to be cautious since weather has not allowed ice thickness to form.

Before walking on ice people should inspect the

ice surface, note the colour of the ice, and measure its thickness. Dull grey ice is a sign it’s unsafe to step on, whereas blue ice is clear and strong.

“When you’re considering heading out for a

day of skating, a greater ice thickness is required for a group than for one skater. The Canadian Red Cross recommends that ice should be at least 15 cm (6 inches) thick to carry

a single person,” the Ontario website said. “But if you’re heading out with a group of friends for skating or a game of shinny, ensure it’s 20 centimetres (8 inches).”

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