

The Aquinas

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The student voice of the University of Scranton

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Students threatened by increased violence (p. 3)

Student Activities pullout section inside

La Festa Italiana brings pizza, funnel cake (p. 8)

Team survives near-fatal crash in Canada

By KATIE KELLY
Assistant News Editor

It's the stuff movies are made of—a freak accident, a valiant rescue effort and a group of athletes demonstrating the strength and perseverance to live through a near tragedy and come out with a renewed sense of themselves and their goals.

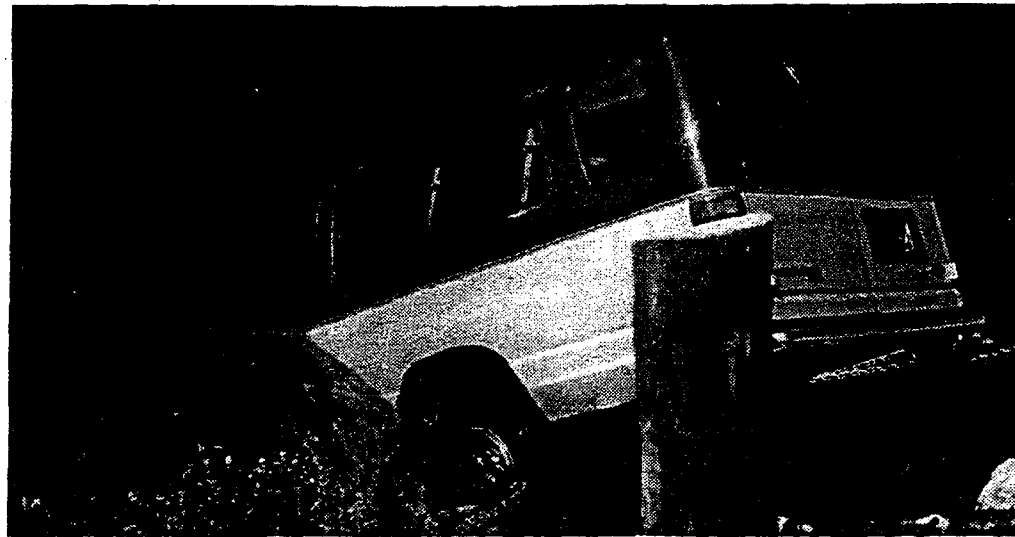
The story of the University's cross country team's recent misadventure in Canada certainly is a fantastic one. It is a terrifying tale of joy and of pain, an amazing account of a tragedy averted and a testament to the calm leadership of a few courageous individuals.

The accident occurred on Saturday, August 19, when a van driven by senior Rob D'Arcy lost traction while rounding a sharp curve and plunged into the murky waters of Wolf Lake near Westport, Ontario. After skidding off the road, the van sunk in 15 feet of water. Nine of the 11 passengers freed themselves from the submerged vehicle and swam to safety.

Maria DiGiorgio, a freshman from Staten Island, N.Y., pulled herself through a broken window and swam to shore. She sliced her thumb and cut her lower leg in the process.

"I really thought everybody else had died," DiGiorgio said. "It was very scary."

Stacie May, a freshman from Rochester, N.Y., also freed herself from the vehicle. Although she has blocked most of the incident from her memory, May recalls being



Workers retrieve the van from Wolf Lake in Canada. The van plunged into the water while carrying several members of the University cross country team.

stepped on as others frantically scrambled from the sunken van.

Both girls had only minor injuries and returned to running within days. They credit the kindness and compassion offered by team members not involved in the accident for pulling them through these hard times.

The rescue began when Dinis Camara, a freshman from Rockville, Md., alerted Assistant Coach Steve Liedacker to the situation, when he shouted, "Coach, they're in the water!"

Laidacker, a 1980 Scranton graduate, was driving another team van about one-eighth of a mile up the road when the accident occurred. His initial reaction was disbelief. "We had been travelling too slow for such a thing to happen," he said. "It

seemed like an impossibility."

Realizing what had occurred, Laidacker ran to the scene and quickly surveyed the situation. Noting that several women had still not surfaced, he dove into the water to initiate a search.

On this first dive, he broke the driver's side window and discovered sophomore Annamaria Rigolio, who had been struggling to exit the vehicle. Laidacker brought her to the surface and continued his search.

On his fourth dive, Laidacker broke one of the long windows near the back of the van. There he found Jill Polakowski. He pulled the unconscious girl from the van by her hair and brought her to the shore, where she was revived.

Polakowski, who struggled to release

her seatbelt in an effort to get out of the van, recalls feeling anger that she was "letting herself die" and could not do anything to prevent it.

"The strangest thoughts raced through my head," she said. "I kept thinking that we were going to be in Sports Illustrated like the Notre Dame swim team." (The Notre Dame swimmers were involved in a motor vehicle crash a few years ago and made national headlines.)

The Royal runners have not hit SI yet, but they have captured quite an audience. Nearly 60 publications both in the United States and Canada, including a national newsletter published by the National Collegiate Athletic Association, have featured stories about the accident.

As Laidacker was saving Polakowski, Mike Calderone rescued Elena DeFrancesco and brought her out of the water. Chris Warren, a freshman from Endwell, N.Y., assisted in her revival.

The entire rescue mission, from the time Calderone and Laidacker dove into the water until the moment when all passengers were accounted for on shore, took only about six minutes.

Reflecting on this experience, Laidacker noted that during the rescue he and Calderone shared the common belief that everything was going to be alright. "Death was not an option here," he said.

Emergency crews from four local

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Residence halls defaced with racial slurs

By ANDY WHELPLEY and
KEIR BANCROFT
Aquinas News Editors

Vandals scrawled swastikas and racial slurs in several areas of Redington Hall early on the morning of August 28. Sunday morning, students discovered another racial epithet in Gannon Hall.

Frantz Alcindor and Vivian Berrios, Residence Life Staff members in Redington Hall discovered the first slurs at around 2 a.m.

"We saw on one of the students' message board a swastika and a KKK written in the middle

of it," Alcindor said.

A formal investigation began after more marks turned up the next morning. According to Alcindor, swastikas were found on door tags and message boards on the fifth and zero floors. Racial slurs were written on a large message board and a large swastika was drawn in the zero floor lounge.

"I couldn't understand how someone would have the audacity to write something like that," said Berrios, a junior from Dix Hills, NY.

According to Patrick Rombalski, director of Residence Life, a Gannon Hall resident found

another racial slur on her message board at around 3:30 a.m. Sunday.

The University responded to the incidents immediately. Rombalski and James Bryan, vice president for Student Affairs, sent letters to residents of Redington, Gannon, Lavis and McCormick Halls informing them of the incidents.

According to Rombalski the University takes racial incidents seriously. He said, "We want to know about it right away."

Residence Life Staff have been instructed on how to preserve evidence of such incidents. When those responsible are discovered,

the University will recommend suspension or expulsion.

"One of the most basic things we're working at here is a good, strong and caring community," said Rombalski. "If we ever knew of somebody trying to prevent that from happening, absolutely, we do not want them as part of it."

Alcindor, a Haitian-American from Elmont, NY, is contributing to the growing diversity of the campus population. He stated that some have speculated as to whether the attack was directed towards him personally.

see Slurs, page 5

Accident *(continued from page 1)*

communities appeared at the scene quickly, and all involved in the accident were transported to Kingston General Hospital in Kingston, Ontario, for evaluation.

Polakowski was hospitalized overnight and DeFrancesco remained in the hospital until Wednesday, August 23, but the other members of the team returned to the lodge after receiving the necessary treatments.

All of the parents were contacted as soon as possible and reassured that everything was under control.

Amazingly, the team contin-

ued their training regimen, each individual practicing to the best of his or her ability.

On Monday, August 21, several male team members returned to the site of the accident and, using scuba equipment, retrieved nearly 85% of the girls' lost belongings from the submerged van.

The few days that they spent together in Canada in the aftermath of the accident, according to Polakowski and Laidacker, were "phenomenal".

"It was a time of sharing, of hugs and tears, and of tremendous growth for the team as a whole,"

Polakowski said.

This spirit of solidarity returned to Scranton with the team, and according to Laidacker, puts them at a distinct advantage in the upcoming athletic season.

"The talent on this team is fantastic," said Laidacker.

"Combine that talent with the teamwise attitude they developed through this experience and the potential for both teams is absolutely enormous," he said.

The cross country teams open their competitive season this Saturday at the Lebanon Valley Invitational.

Eating out.



Aquinas Photo/JOAN SUGRUE

Students gather on the Royal Way for lunch after Tuesday's Mass of the Holy Spirit.

Slurs *(continued from page 1)*

"If it was directed towards me, I think it should be an indicator to the school of how foolish students act when you add one more person who looks different," Alcindor said.

"In an institution of higher learning, you hope that individuals would become challenged," Alcindor said. "Unfortunately, the University doesn't have a lot of people of diverse backgrounds."

The number of University students of color is rising according to Bryan.

"It's been a growing trend in our freshman classes over the past several years, moving from relatively small numbers of one percent or two percent to seven percent," Bryan said. "It is a very conscious effort on the part of the institution."

"We're hoping that these incidents are not a portent of things to come," Bryan said, "but we're certainly not going to assume that they won't be."

The News Section would really, really like it if you showed up to our OPEN HOUSE!



Tonight at 7:30 in the Aquinas office.

Open letter to the Cross Country team

[The following is excerpted from a letter sent by the parents of Jill Polakowski, one of the students rescued from the sinking van, to the other members of the team. They have graciously allowed us to reprint that letter here.]

To All Concerned,

With emotions running high and a variety of mixed feelings, we felt compelled to share our thoughts with a number of people, so we decided to put it all in one letter.

How does one thank another for saving a life? The variety of choices is endless yet none seems adequate. To the girls and guys who helped, and we know that was all of you, we extend our sincerest gratitude. Everybody played an integral part in the rescue, whether it was alerting Steve that the third vehicle was in the water, or pulling out team members, or helping those that were already out, or by just being there with moral support and calming words.

To Mike, who dived under to rescue Elena, your heroic efforts are more than greatly appreciated. The feeling that you have saved a life will stay with you forever. Be proud and happy!

To Chris and the young men who carried Jill out of the water and helped get some water out of her lungs so she may start breathing, we thank you.

To the girls who stayed with each other, we're glad your loyalty and friendship is strong.

To Rob, please remember no one is at fault. It was just a twist of fate and everything does happen for a reason. Hope all your injuries heal quickly.

To Coach Steve Laidacker, what can we say? Your responsible nature, good judgement and quick action were outstanding. Your knowledge and strength saved three lives. The best hug we ever received was at the hospital when we were able to hold Jill and see with our own eyes that she was alive and recovering. Both of us had first thoughts of being thankful to God for watching over all of them and for giving Jill the chance to continue to live.

Many thanks to Annamaria and all the girls and guys who talked with Jill, gave her moral support, and lifted her spirits. Your comradeship is more than commendable, especially since you all suffered through this near-tragic event. It's great to see everyone being so caring, sticking together, and sharing your thoughts and feelings. This world would definitely be a better place if there were more wonderful people like you.

To all the parents and families of this special team, you should be extremely proud of these fine ladies and men. They have undeniably exemplified the words bravery, caring, friendship and love. Above all of these, faith has shown through...faith in God and faith in each other.

Good luck, Royals, in your upcoming cross country season! God bless you, and may He continue to watch over you!

Sincerely,

Walter and Yolanda Polakowski
Two Loyal Fans