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Training helps Sheriff's Flotilla member save a man's life

MOBILE, Alabama — Few people set out to be a hero. Normally a person just ends up being in the right place, at the right time and does the right thing.

That is what happened to Larry Goodman last weekend. Thanks to his quick decisions, he saved an incapacitated man from almost certain death.

Goodman was returning in his bass boat from a fishing camp in the Mobile River Delta late Saturday afternoon, March 4, 2017. He was heading back to a boat launch on the Causeway when something caught his eye just as he approached the Interstate 10 Bayway.

On the horizon was a center console boat that was listing to its right side, full of water and Goodman thought it had sunk.

“Then I got closer and I saw a person in it,” said Goodman. “He was unresponsive. Then I saw he had a gash on the top of his head.

“The only thing above the water was his face. He was not wearing a life jacket. The rest of his body was under water.”

In this situation, many people might have been confused on what to do next. For this victim, he could not have been discovered by a better Good Samaritan.

For the last 20 years, Goodman has been part of the Mobile County Sheriff's Flotilla. The group's mission is to conduct the search for or the rescue of persons lost or drowned in Mobile County or at the request of neighboring counties.

To improve his skills, the Flotilla members have regular training sessions with the South Alabama Rescue Search and Recovery (SARSAR) organization. This is a group is sponsored by U.S. Coast Guard Sector Mobile and supported by the Mobile County Health Department.

“MCHD commends volunteers like the Mobile County Sheriff's Flotilla for making difference and saving a human life,” said Dr. Bernard H. Eichold II, Health Officer of Mobile County.

“Larry knew what to do, how to do it and remained calm. It was an effective rescue of a seriously injured person.”

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The drills proved beneficial this day. Goodman immediately provided physical assistance, called 911 from his cell phone, and informed the operator of the situation and the location of where Goodman would transport the victim.

Goodman then saw the man was blinking his eyes. Goodman identified himself, but the man could not respond.

Just then, Goodman saw another boat that had just launched. He alerted them to the situation and they came to assist. One passenger jumped into Goodman's boat and took the helm while Goodman tended to the injured man.

"As soon as we reached the dock and tied up, the other guy left," he said. "I never got his name. He just said he was glad he could help."

All Goodman had in his boat to help keep the victim comfortable was a beach towel. It would have to do.

"I was afraid he might be hypothermic from being in the water," Goodman said. "I just kept talking to him, and kept him covered."

Shortly after docking, the paramedics arrived. After checking the victim's vitals, they placed him on a backboard and lifted him out of the boat. Then the ambulance raced away. Suddenly the crisis was over.

"I never even got the man's name," Goodman said. "I called the marine police (Alabama Law Enforcement Agency's Marine Patrol) later to get his condition. They said he had a broken pelvis, broken ribs and a bruised heart.

"I don't think they are any witnesses to how the accident occurred. With the way the console was broken, I would think he hit something like a piling and was thrown just far enough to keep in the boat. I have no doubt in my mind he would have drowned if he had not stayed in the boat."

Goodman shrugs off any congratulations for his efforts. He said he just wishes the man well.

"I would love to meet him after he recovers," said Goodman, who is retiring from Alabama Power on March 31. "I've done my part. Now it's time for others to do theirs and get him well."

Spoken like a true hero.