



SPARKS FIRE DEPARTMENT

*FIRE CHIEF
Tom Garrison*

On the afternoon of July 1, 2013, at approximately 3:44 pm, the Sparks Fire Department was dispatched to the Truckee River, at the McCarran Bridge, for a possible drowning. Upon arrival, firefighters were advised by citizens that two males had been seen going underwater approximately ¼ miles west of the bridge. Once arriving at that location, firefighters encountered a man swimming in the river who stated he could see at least one person underwater through his snorkel mask. This victim was located in an area of the river where the currents had carved out a depression approximately 10-12 feet deep on the river bed, and where the currents make it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to swim out of. Witnesses stated that the victims had only been underwater a short period of time, increasing their chances of survival if removed from the river quickly.

Firefighter Curt Wilson, an eight year Sparks Fire Department veteran, a certified Swift Water Rescue Technician, and a former member of the Department's Water Rescue Team, was one of the first personnel to arrive on scene. Although Curt had recently retired from the Water Rescue Team due to a knee injury, he was confident that he could successfully perform the rescue. Curt has a reputation of being a strong swimmer, and demonstrated no hesitation to place himself in harm's way. It must be fully understood that even with the floatation device, rescuers would be placing themselves into the same hazardous position as the victims, and have the same difficulty swimming out of the depression.

Firefighter Wilson, still in station pants and t-shirt, removed his shoes, donned a personal floatation device and helmet, and carrying a rope bag, entered the river to begin rescue efforts. His plan was to dive underwater and loop the rope around the victim's wrist, allowing additional personnel on shore to pull the victim out of the depression. After several attempts, he realized that he would not be able to dive to the depth needed to reach the victim. To be able to dive deeper, he removed his floatation device, and was finally able to reach the first victim who was then pulled from the river. After the victim's arrival at the shore, resuscitation efforts were immediately started by Fire and REMSA personnel.

By this time, three additional Water Rescue Team members had arrived, and all were notified by the swimmer with the snorkel mask that he could see another victim deeper in the depression. Each team member attempted several times to rescue the second victim, but were unsuccessful due to the depth of the victim and strong river currents. Firefighter Wilson had made numerous

attempts to reach both victims, and was beginning to feel the fatigue caused from battling the strong currents. He made one last effort to reach the second victim and was finally able to reach the victim's wrist and loop the rope around it. In all, it was estimated that Firefighter Wilson made at least 10 separate rescue attempts.

Although both victims lost their lives in the accident, Firefighter Wilson's actions were very heroic and provided the only possible chance of survival for the victims. He willingly placed himself in great risk in order to save the lives of others. He was successful in the rescue not only because he is a strong swimmer, but also due to his willingness to take a great personal risk by diving deeper into the depression. Firefighter Wilson was fully aware of the risk he was taking, and did not hesitate.

Because of his actions, Firefighter Wilson was awarded the Fire Department's Medal of Valor, and was also named Northern Nevada's American Red Cross Firefighter Real Hero Award.