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THE PAPER WITH THE NEWS

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 13, 2008

## Family seeks inquest into drowning

by Karen Longwell

The family of Josue Sebastian Perez, the 16-year-old boy who drowned in Bracebridge July 26, claims that unanswered questions continue to surround the death of their loved one.

"Sabby" as Perez was known to friends and family, died near the Wilson's Falls generating station where he had been swimming with six friends July 26. Ontario Provincial Police found his body July 27.

Perez's family says they wonder why a strong, physically fit boy perished on the river. They also want to raise awareness about the dangers of the Muskoka River.

Some reports claimed Sebastian was not a strong swimmer.

Jorge Perez, Sebastian's father, said Sebastian had taken swimming lessons and was involved in sports, in particular skateboarding. He had been to swimming spots in the area this summer and last year, his father indicated.

"He's very sports minded," said Perez. "I would say (he was) a very strong swimmer."

Perez said it is not clear at this time how the accident happened.

"One of his friends said there was an eddy or a whirlpool," he said in a telephone interview from East York.

The friends believe something — either a natural occurrence or from the generating station — pulled Sebastian under the water, said longtime family friend Alan Preyra.

Preyra, who is also acting as the family's lawyer, is helping to set up a fund to support the family.

"We don't know why there would be an eddy there — the circumstances are very troubling."

Preyra said he would like to bring together all the stakeholders and find out how the drowning happened. He said they are now seeking a coroner's inquest.

Bracebridge Generation Ltd., which operates the Wilson's Falls plant, could not be reached immediately for comment.

Preyra calls the death senseless.



**JOSUE SEBASTIAN PEREZ**

(See 'Inquest' on page A10)

A10 BRACEBRIDGE EXAMINER, Wednesday, August 13, 2008.

## Inquest sought into Wilson's Falls drowning

(Continued from front)

"It is devastating for the family," he said.

Preyra has been a friend of the East York family for about 12 years.

The fund, started on July 31, aims to do two things: help Sebastian's parents, Jorge and Isabel Perez with funeral costs, and help them raise public awareness of the dangers of the area around Wilson's Falls.

Contributions to the fund had reached about \$2,000 as of Aug. 11.

Unfortunately, the Perez family does not have a lot of money and found it difficult to meet the funeral costs.

The family also wants to ensure other families do not have to go through a similar tragedy.

"We want to make sure it doesn't happen again," said Preyra.

Preyra said he and the family are aware there is a danger sign posted at the falls but wondered if something more could be done to make the area safer.

He suggested bigger signs and a fence around the area.

"Our main goal is that the area becomes safe," said Perez, adding he hopes to make the area safer for tourists who may not be as familiar with the dangers as residents.

Preyra has been in contact with the Red Cross and the Lifesaving Society for possible future collaboration with the fund.

He also hopes Jorge and Isabel Perez would be able to do a talk at Sebastian's school. Sebastian was a popular teen at East York Collegiate.

About 200 of his classmates attended his funeral, Preyra said.

Sebastian had just turned 16 years old in July. He has an identical twin brother and an 18-year-old brother.

Perez said the family is trying to return to regular life.

"We have to continue . . .," he said.

Perez said it is particularly difficult for Sebastian's twin, who had a special link with his brother.

In a website memorial to Sebastian, the teen is described as easygoing and fun-loving.

"He was possessed with an outgoing personality, a lively imagination and a mellowed enthusiasm for life that allowed him to be constantly on the go," said the memorial.

He took part in soccer, basketball, skateboarding and swimming, the website indicates.

"He was a really good boy," said Perez.

People interested in donating to the trust account for the Perez family and the public awareness campaign can do so through any TD Canada Trust bank. The account number is 63203771993.



**MEMORIAL.** A wreath lies on the ground near Wilson's Falls, the site where 16-year old Josue Sebastian Perez drowned last month. A trust fund has recently been established to help Perez's family deal with costs they have incurred since the accident.

Photo by Brett Thompson