

# The Des Moines Register

FRIDAY, JULY 3, 2009 | DESMOINESREGISTER.COM | THE NEWSPAPER IOWA DEPENDS UPON | 75¢ | M

**Register Exclusive**

## 'I'm glad to be alive, but I lost my husband'

**Patricia Ralph-Neely, who survived a plunge over the Center Street dam, wants to thank her rescuers.**

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Thursday was supposed to be just another night in Alan Neely and Patricia Ralph-Neely's happily ever after.

The retired Pleasant Hill couple planned to float in a boat along the Des Moines River with some of their grandchildren, watching fireworks explode in the night sky after the Yankee Doodle Pops concert at the state Capitol.

They went out in their boat Tuesday to scout a spot for the big night.

Their boat got caught in a current and was pulled over the Center Street dam. The waters sucked Alan Neely, 62, down and ripped the life vest from his body. He drowned.

The couple were not experienced boaters, she said.

"We have an RV, and that's about it," she said in an interview after being released from Mercy Medical Center on Thursday.



ANDREA MELENDEZ/THE REGISTER

**Patricia Ralph-Neely gasps for air as rescuers work to pull her from the Des Moines River on Tuesday afternoon after the boat she was in capsized. Her husband, Alan Neely, drowned.**

"We shouldn't have been where we were."

Quick work by a pair of nearby construction workers saved Ralph-Neely from a similar fate.

Jason Oglesbee — clad in dusty work boots, blue jeans and a hard hat — dangled

from a heavy chain on the end of a crane, stretched out his beefy right arm and pulled Ralph-Neely from the waters that lashed at her 67-year-old body.

Somebody gave Ralph-Neely Oglesbee's

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MARY CHIND/THE REGISTER

Jason Oglesbee reaches for Patricia Ralph-Neely to pull her from the water below the Center Street dam on Tuesday.

## RESCUE

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and crane operator Joe Lowe's telephone numbers. She's tried to call them, but their voice mail boxes are full — a result of international media attention spawned by the photographs and video of the dramatic rescue.

If she could reach them, she would thank them, she said. She would thank them for risking their own lives to save hers. She would thank them for remember-

ing her husband.

"I've seen the men who saved me on TV say this was not a happy ending," Ralph-Neely said. "I feel the same way. They did a great thing. I'm glad to be alive, but I lost my husband."

She does not remember most of the accident. She does not know how she kept afloat as the water pouring over the dam pulled her through a torrent.

All she knows is that her husband of 11 years and her best friend for 23 years is gone.

Both had been married

previously. Alan Neely and Patricia Ralph-Neely "courted the old-fashioned way," she said.

"We dated for 12 years. We didn't even live together."

Their blended family contains four children and a dozen grandchildren, ranging in age from 8 to 20.

"Alan loved to be with his grandchildren," Ralph-Neely said. "They were his favorite things in the world."

A close second for Alan Neely was billiards. Neely would head down to a local pool hall with a few friends

and beat them all.

"He'd come home and clap and say, 'Boy, I really whipped them tonight,'" his wife recalled.

Neely was a partner in a heating and air-conditioning business for decades. He retired a few years ago.

She taught first grade at Stowe Elementary School for 34 years. The retired couple planned to travel and spend their golden years doting on their grandchildren.

Funeral arrangements for Neely are pending at Hamilton's Funeral Home.