

JUST IN TIME, A LIFELINE

A construction worker plucks a woman from the roiling waters of the river, but her boating companion dies.

By LISA COLONNO and CHASE DAVIS
lcolonno@dmreg.com

A construction worker dangled from a heavy-duty chain supported by a crane to rescue a woman from the swirling waters of the Des Moines River on Tuesday afternoon.

The dramatic rescue was met

with cheers from spectators who had gathered on the banks of the river and nearby bridges after the boat the woman was in went over the Center Street dam.

Minutes before the woman was rescued, a Des Moines fire rescue team pulled the body of the woman's boating companion, a man of about

60, from the river downstream. The man had drowned.

The boat went over the dam shortly after 4 p.m. and the woman, who was also about 60, became caught in a boil just over the dam. She was wearing a life jacket and was partially clothed when she was pulled

RESCUE, PAGE 9A



See a photographic sequence of events leading up to the rescue. **Page 9A**



Go to DesMoinesRegister.com to watch a video of the hero, Jason Oglesbee, talk about the rescue and hear what one eyewitness said about the situation.

The Des Moines Register

WEDNESDAY, JULY 1, 2009 | DESMOINESREGISTER.COM | THE NEWSPAPER IOWA DEPENDS UPON | 75¢ | METRO EDITION



MARY CHIND/THE REGISTER

River rescue in downtown Des Moines: A woman is pulled from near the Center Street dam by construction worker Jason Oglesbee on Tuesday. A man who was with the unidentified woman died in the Des Moines River. A rescue team from the Des Moines Fire Department tried several times to rescue the woman but could not get close enough to her.

SEQUENCE OF EVENTS

1.



ANDREA MELENDEZ/THE REGISTER

2.



1. A woman who fell into the Des Moines River struggles in the swift-moving waters near the downtown Center Street dam on Tuesday.

2. Construction worker Jason Oglesbee is lowered to the river and grabs the woman's arm.

3. The crane used by the construction crew pulls Oglesbee and the unidentified woman free from the water.

4. Rescue personnel take over after the woman is lifted into their boat by Oglesbee, who is secured in a harness.

3.



4.



RESCUE

FROM PAGE 1A

from the water by Jason Oglesbee, a construction worker for Cramer & Associates in Grimes.

"They just harnessed me up and dipped me down in the water and I grabbed her and the crane drag her to the boat and that's it," Oglesbee said. "What are you going to do if she's like that? It's no big deal. The whole crew did it."

The construction crew rigged Oglesbee to a crane after an initial attempt to rescue her with the crane was unsuccessful. The woman was too weak at that point to hold on to the crane or to life preservers being thrown to her by a fire rescue crew, said Sgt. Joe Gonzalez with the Des Moines Police Department.

The woman was able to talk some when she was pulled from the water about 4:35 p.m. and she was stable at Mercy Medical Center on Tuesday evening, Gonzalez said.

The woman's and man's names were withheld Tuesday pending notification of family members, but they were a couple and both were from the Des Moines area, Gonzalez said. The man was not wearing a life jacket when he was found.

Capt. Steve Brown, a spokesman for the Des Moines Fire Department, said rescuing someone trapped in the turbulent boil is "very rare."

"We are trained for getting people out of those situations," Brown said. "The construction workers definitely went well above and beyond."



"She was getting beat up by the water pretty good — they didn't think she had much longer to last."

Brown said a rescue team from the fire department made multiple attempts to get close, but was unable to do so.

Oglesbee was reluctant to give

his name or be interviewed when first approached by members of the media. He later allowed a couple of questions before returning to work. The crew from Cramer & Associates was on hand to construct the high-arching Center Street pedestrian bridge.

When asked if he volunteered to be rigged to the crane, Oglesbee said he just happened to be wearing the harness. Joe Lowe operated the crane that suspended Oglesbee above the water.

"I just told her to hang on tight. I won't let go," Oglesbee recalled.

Ron Williams was fishing along the west bank of the river with his two sons when he heard someone holler.

"I heard someone go, 'Hey' and looked up and seen the boat crashing," Williams said.

A tip of the boat continued to bob above and below the water after the rescue. Brown said the life jackets floating in the boil near

the dam could remain trapped there for days.

What the couple was doing on the river and how the boat came to go over the dam are under investigation, Gonzalez said.

"If it wasn't for the team effort of Cramer & Associates, we might have two drowning victims," Gonzalez said.

A sign along the west bank of the river near the dam reads: "Danger! Recirculating currents below this dam can trap and drown victims."

Robert Cramer of Cramer & Associates said his crew told him that at one point the boat was anchored about 100 feet upstream from the bridge and the couple was having trouble

with the boat.

"They pulled up their anchor and they seemed to have the thing running, but then they kind of banged the boat into the false work — that's what we call that rusty steel that's standing out in the river to hold the bridge up," Cramer said. "And so then the man in the boat started yelling at the woman to put her life jacket on."

"The boat started slipping over

the dam, and it just crashed and fell into pieces."

Register staff writers Clark Kauffman and Danny Valentine contributed to this article.

SUMMER OF
59

WIN
ONE OF FIFTY-NINE
\$1,000 GIFT CARDS

CELEBRATING OUR
50TH
YEAR



VISIT YOUR LOCAL KUM & GO OR

WWW.KUMANDGO.COM TO WIN