



**CITY OF LODI
COUNCIL COMMUNICATION**

AGENDA TITLE: Recognizing Firefighter Jeremy Quaglia for Life Saving Actions and Further Recognizing Captain Pete Iturraran, Acting Captain Aimee Dalrymple and Engineer Rick Gerlack

MEETING DATE: October 20, 2004

PREPARED BY: Michael E. Pretz

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Appropriate Recognition

BACKGROUND INFORMATION: Over the Labor Day weekend, the Stanislaus County Finmen were on their annual abalone diving trip to the Albion River Campground. On Sunday, the weather was nice and the water flat. Three boats went out. The boats were anchored in twenty-five feet of water.

Once in the water visibility was reduced to 6 feet. Toward the end of the dive, most of the abalone divers had returned to their boats. Captain Iturraran and Acting Captain Dalrymple were in one boat, Engineer Gerlack was in his boat along with Chris Dalrymple, who was tending a raft for three other divers, Roberto, Trent, and Jeremy Quaglia. As Trent surfaced, he started yelling "Help Me", "Help Me". Jeremy swam over to Trent's location and disappeared under the water. Jeremy surfaced with Roberto, who he had found at the bottom of the river, face up. Roberto was not breathing and his color was blue. Dave Rose, also part of the diver group, and Rick Gerlack raced over to Roberto's lifeless body. They helped load Roberto into Dave's boat and Chris Dalrymple, an Oakland paramedic, joined them as they raced over to the docks. On the docks, Jeremy and Chris, both paramedics applied their skills to revive Roberto. They continued administering patient care until they turned the patient over to the flight nurse from the air ambulance.

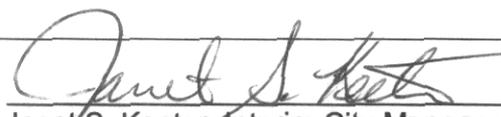
Roberto was flown out to Fort Bragg Hospital. He was released from the hospital three days later. He is alive today because of the quick reaction and paramedic skills of Jeremy Quaglia.

FUNDING: None


Michael E. Pretz, Fire Chief

MEP/lh

cc: City Attorney

APPROVED: 
Janet S. Keeter, Interim City Manager

Lodi firefighter surfaces from ocean depths a lifesaver

By [Jennifer Pearson Bonnett](#)
News-Sentinel Staff Writer

It was warm outside. A bright sunny day on the coast near Fort Bragg, the first day of a coveted three-day holiday weekend.

A group of Lodi firefighters readied their boats and diving equipment, looking forward to harvesting abalone on the ocean floor.

Little did they know a near-tragedy was waiting for them on this calm late summer day. One firefighter in particular, Geremy "Buck" Quaglia, would be asked on this day to respond swiftly in a life-and-death test of his abilities.

As it turned out, Quaglia and his colleagues met the challenge.

Abalone hunting can be dangerous. Participants armed with only a pry bar descend to the depths of deep, cold ocean waters seeking the perfect shellfish. They usually use no scuba gear, instead relying on a mask and snorkel.

The best and most experienced can free dive 40 feet.

Roberto Casillas, a Fremont man who used to dive in the U.S. Navy, was also drawn to the ocean in search of abalone the same day as Quaglia and the other Lodi firefighters.

That morning, the experienced diver debated even going. There had been some commotion outside his tent, and he and his buddy, Trenton Bacolini, hadn't slept well.

"I told him, 'Let's just swim around,' and that's what we did," Casillas said. "I have plenty of abs in the refrigerator, but I thought I'd get one for him since I was more experienced."

Yelling for help

In a memoir shared with the News-Sentinel, Casillas said he had dove down some 15 feet to fetch an abalone for Bacolini.

Down, down, down he went.

Casillas dove for what he thought was a pretty good-size abalone, pulled it from a rock and cradled it against his chest. Then he dropped the tool used for prying the shellfish.

"I looked down and decided to go back down for it before I made it all the way back up, knowing it would be hard to find once I lost sight of it," Casillas wrote.

"So I went back down and actually retrieved it when I suddenly realized that I may have over-extended my dive. Then I dropped them both: What might have been my biggest ab ever and my lucky pry bar."

He headed to the surface as quickly as he could go, knowing he had to get the surface -- and fast.

He gulped in his first mouthful of water. As he kicked harder, he took another breath. And, another gulp of water. It was salty, and cold.

"I remember thinking that it was kind of beautiful looking through the water at the bright surface," Casillas wrote. "The water was clear and cool, like ice or glass. I remember no panic, no major desperation, nothing adverse at all."

After 45 minutes of diving in the chilly waters, the Lodi group was wrapping up. But Quaglia wanted just one more shellfish.



Jeremy "Buck" Quaglia

Suddenly, Bacolini was at the surface, yelling for help.

He said his friend, Casillas, had just floated by, motionless. He could see his fluorescent diving fins, attached to an unmoving body wearing a black wetsuit.

Without snorkeling equipment, Quaglia dove 10 to 15 feet down to a ledge near the bottom of the ocean floor.

"He was suspended horizontal in the water ... on his back, looking straight up. You can't do that. You get water up in your nose."

Casillas wasn't breathing. His lips were pursed and blue.

Basically dead

After Quaglia located Casillas, he detached the 24-pound weight belt from his waist. When he pulled the victim to the surface, Quaglia said he was basically dead. He estimates Casillas was underwater for three to five minutes.

After getting him to the boat, Quaglia said the victim was pulled out of the water, and the group sped a quarter of a mile to land.

"From the time I laid my hands on him and we pulled into the dock, it was about two minutes."

He wasn't sure Casillas would make it. He wasn't sure it would be a rescue -- or a body recovery.

Quaglia, 28, attended medical school and was even studying to be a doctor before becoming a firefighter. He keeps a paramedic kit in his truck. Once on land, he rushed to get it and started CPR and mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. He was assisted by Lodi Fire Engineer Aimee Dalrymple's husband, Chris, who is a paramedic for the Oakland Fire Department.

While waiting for a unit of Albion-Little River Fire Department to arrive, the Lodi firefighters gave the man oxygen, while Lodi's Dalrymple, Pete Iturraran and Rick Gerlack assisted with other life-saving measures. They stripped Casillas of his wetsuit, instead of cutting it like paramedics would have. It was something he noted in his memoir.

Soon a medical helicopter was landing, its rotors sending sand into the air.

A mother's thanks

Casillas, 43, heard the sound. It was familiar, he wrote, but muffled. When he opened his eyes, though blurry like looking through the end of a Coke bottle, he saw a yellow helicopter.

He remembers coming in and out of consciousness during the ride, being unloaded and wheeled into the hospital. At one point, he wrote, he was asked to count backwards from 30 to 1. He made it to 27.

Around the same time, Quaglia was able to finish his fishing expedition. You can collect three abalone per day, per person, and the Lodi resident had one more left to fetch.

So Iturraran offered to take the boat out again, and Quaglia got his last abalone.

"I ended up joining the club, so I'll probably go out diving again," Quaglia said.

Casillas awoke on Sunday morning, trying to pull at the tubes in his mouth and the IVs in his arm.

On the same day, his mother trekked through the rolling mountain hills to come by the firefighters' campsite to thank Quaglia for saving her son. They had just finished frying abalone with some 100 dive club members and were sitting around the camp fire when she walked up, offering a hug and gratitude to Quaglia.

Casillas survived, and was released from the Mendocino Regional Hospital the next day.

"For being dead on Friday, to being released on Monday, that's pretty good," Quaglia said.

A first for Quaglia

The Lodi firefighter refuses to admit he's a hero.

"I was just the closest one to him, I wasn't the one who noticed he was gone, his friend was.

"I just know what to do because that's what we do for a living."

Quaglia was hired by Lodi in 2002. He is a firefighter and a licensed paramedic.

Casillas, who has been diving for 30 years, headed back to work as a microscope salesman on Monday. He's had a lot of time to ponder his near-drowning.

He laughs when he talks about the experience, noting he only met Quaglia that morning on the boat out to the dive site. They had exchanged pleasantries, he said Monday. In his memoir, Casillas joked that had he known Quaglia would have to resuscitate him, he would have shaved that morning.

They haven't talked since they were on their way out to the dive site.

While he has revived others, this is the first person Quaglia he has saved while off duty. In the past, when he visited people in the hospital it made me feel a bit awkward "because they feel like they owe you something for saving their life," he said.

"In the line of duty, it happens a lot. When you're away from work, it doesn't."

Casillas, who has two children and a fiancé, could have suffered brain damage. Today, he feels fine and the only instruction he's received from his doctor is undergoing a stress test to check on his heart.

"I feel fantastic, and I'm certainly looking forward to our next dive in November," he said, adding that just last week he bought a boat. "(Diving) is something I've always loved to do. I'm a waterboy, so to speak."

To say Casillas was fortunate he was diving with firefighters is an understatement.

"Not only a group of firefighters, but we had two paramedics on scene," Iturraran said. "That guy was lucky. His chances of survival were excellent, and everything was in his favor."

Casillas is looking forward to diving again, going deep for the elusive abalones.

He is also looking forward to meeting the man who pulled him from those chill and dangerous waters, saving his life.

"I want to shake Buck's hand," Casillas said.

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