

Community comes together to help families of drowning victims

By ROBERT PIERCE

• Leader & Times

A little more than a week ago, workers from the Oklahoma Highway Patrol, the Beaver County, Okla., Sheriff's Office and Marine enforcements, along with a dive team and various other law enforcement agencies came to recover the body of a child and that of an adult woman from an area lake.

Since then, the families and friends of 5-year-old Aiden Hammock Thompson and Betty Jean McManaway, 48, both of Beaver, have been mourning the losses of their loved ones, and along with the grieving, financial needs must be met as well.



Local people are helping out with that need with fundraisers, and Liberal's Ronda Salazar and Joe Denoyer have taken on the task of raising money to assist with the necessity of money.

Salazar is a local Avon rep and has set up a fundraiser through that company for both Thompson and McManaway, and she posted about it on her Facebook page.

"The pics included in this post are the things that can be ordered through the fundraiser," she said.

The Leader & Times spoke to Salazar Tuesday, and with many stories about what happened with the drowning, she explained what she believed happened last week at Evans Chambers Lake.

"The lady took Aiden with her kids out to the lake," she said. "From the reports, I understand he fell in, and she went in after him."

Workers searched for two days for Thompson's body, and Salazar said McManaway also had her twins, age 10, with her as well.

The deaths left both families with no money to pay for funerals. Salazar said a service took place this week for McManaway, and both victims were cremated.

Salazar said she got involved with assisting Thompson's family after finding out from her niece who the parents of the child were.

"I had read it on Facebook that there was a little boy missing, but I had no clue who the parents were," she said. "My niece called me and told me who it was. It was Josh Hammock's son. I know Josh. I don't know the boy's mother, but I know Josh. He was in school with my nephew.

He was friends with my nephew.”

At that point, Salazar said she wanted to do a fundraiser for Thompson to help with the funeral expenses.

“That’s just something I can do,” she said. “I understand there’s several different things going on. After I decided to do this, there was a guitar Joe donated.”

Thompson and McManaway both each have fundraising pages on the Web site www.gofundme.com. Salazar explained what she will do with the money she collects from the sales of her Avon products.

“All the money, I will distribute evenly to the funeral homes, and what is left, I will split between the two families,” she said.

Salazar said she will have the products for sale for about three weeks, and these purchases are totally separate from the ones her customers normally make.

“There’s only certain things they can get,” she said. “The order is going totally separate. I’m going to have a list of everything.”

Those buying products need to let Salazar know they want to do so to support the families of Thompson and McManaway.

“They can find me on Facebook,” she said. “They can text, call or send me a message on Facebook of what they want. I will order it, but they have to pay it before the order comes in. They will tell me what they want. I will add it up. They have to pay taxes and processing fees. I will add everything up of what they owe. I will let them know, and they have to pay before I put the order in.”

Those who do not live in Liberal are responsible for shipping. To reach Salazar via phone, call her at 620-391-1081.

“It’s a sad situation, and the families need help,” she said.

Denoyer is likewise making an effort to get money for the victims’ families. A donated autographed guitar from country singer Toby Keith is now on display at all three locations of the Bank of Beaver City – one in Turpin, Okla., one in Beaver and one in Liberal.

Donation tickets, Denoyer said in a post on his Facebook page, along with the Talk Liberal Kansas page, will be \$5 each or five for \$20 with a drawing to take place around July 4.

“Proceeds to split the families of Aiden Hammock and Betty McManaway who recently lost their lives in a drowning accident with Betty trying to save little 5-year-old Aiden,” Denoyer said. “Buy as many as you can. Let’s help support these two families.”