



Tuesday, March 9, 2004

Swim coach nominated for heroic service award

By **Jeff Samoray**, OU Web Writer

Because of his actions in saving the life of an Attica woman from a burning vehicle, OU swimming and diving coach Pete Hovland recently was nominated for the Oakland County Sheriff's Department's Citizens Citation for Heroic Service.

In the early hours of Nov. 29, 2003, Hovland was driving to campus for a workout with some of his swimmers. Little did he know he'd help save a life during his morning commute.

Shortly after 8 a.m., Hovland negotiated a series of sharp curves on Rochester Road just south of Lakeville in Addison Township when he saw an overturned minivan off the side of the road. According to the Oakland County Sheriff's report, Janet Jarvis, 60, of Attica, was heading into work at the Rochester Road branch of the Oxford Bank when she hit a patch of black ice, swerved out of control across the oncoming lane, rolled over in the ditch and slid into a tree.

"Those series of curves are pretty sharp, and you can't drive through there very fast even in dry conditions," Hovland said. "I saw the car and noticed that there was nobody at the scene, but the car was still running and its headlights were on – that's when I realized that the accident must have just occurred."

Hovland approached the car with Cecilia Cash, an Oxford Township resident who also stopped to help. The minivan was lying on its passenger side with Jarvis suspended in the driver's seat by her seat belt.

"Mrs. Jarvis was conscious and able to roll down the window. She seemed a little dazed, but still had her wits about her and wasn't in shock," said Hovland, who is certified in first aid and CPR. "I reached inside and turned the ignition off while Cecilia called 911. I asked Mrs. Jarvis if she could move her arms and legs, and it seemed like everything was okay."

"I tried to figure out the best way to get her out of the car because she was suspended in her seat. I thought it would be too difficult to lift her out of the driver's side door. Then I could smell something burning or melting and became more concerned."

A fuel leak was lit by the vehicle's hot exhaust system after Jarvis slid off the road. As smoke began to fill the minivan's interior, Hovland and Cash realized they needed to act quickly.

"Mrs. Jarvis unlocked her power doors, and I was able to jerk open the tailgate hatch. I had to yank on it pretty hard because the vehicle was lying on its side," Hovland said. "Cecilia is a lot smaller than me, which allowed her to crouch down inside the minivan to get to Mrs. Jarvis. I was able to reach in and hold her from falling while Cecilia unhooked her seat belt. I saw flames coming through the dashboard, and we all started to get a little excited. Cecilia had some difficulty pulling Mrs. Jarvis out of the vehicle, so I got inside and we pulled together and sort of spilled out through the back end."

Jarvis was dazed but able to walk on her own. As the group moved behind a group of trees in fear of an explosion, the fire department arrived to find the minivan engulfed in flames.

"The fire was very quick and intense," Hovland said. "The tires exploded and the windshield popped. I was shocked by how fast it went up in flames."

Jarvis was uninjured aside from some bruises and lower back pain that lasted a few days. She had an opportunity to express her gratitude to Hovland and Cash when "The Oxford Leader" later reunited the three for an interview.

"Mrs. Jarvis called us her guardian angels and was very thankful," Hovland said. "She mentioned that her husband

came to get her afterwards at the sheriff's department, and when they drove by the site, they realized the severity of the accident and had a real long cry.

"That set of curves is really dangerous, and I've seen cars off the road there several times. The tree that was next to the minivan got charred, and now that the snow has melted, I see it every day when I drive by. It's a reminder of how quickly a bad situation can take place."

Because of their actions, Deputy Bruce Pearson and the Addison Township substation nominated Hovland and Cash for the Oakland County Sheriff's Department's Citizens Citation for Heroic Service.

Hovland is in his 23rd year as swimming and diving coach at Oakland University. He served as the women's coach in his first two years and men's coach over the next 19. In 2000, he assumed the head coaching duties for both teams. His men's teams have won four NCAA Division II national championships. This year, the women's team won its third-consecutive NIC title. Both teams have won the Mid-Continent Conference title each year since the 1999-2000 season. Last season, Hovland coached a men's squad of five in the NCAA National Championships. He also has served as an assistant coach to former OU swimmers in the 1988 Olympic Games in Seoul and the 2000 games in Sydney.

For more information on Hovland and the Oakland University men's and women's swimming programs, visit the **OU Athletics** Web site.

SUMMARY

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