

Man drowns after falling from sailboat docked at Grand Island yacht club

[Stephen T. Watson](#)

A man drowned early Saturday after falling into the Niagara River from a boat docked at a yacht club on Grand Island, the Grand Island Fire Company reported Saturday afternoon. Officials say the man, identified as 61-year-old Edward Lachapelle of Turner, Maine, fell into the water from a sailboat docked at the Sandy Beach Yacht Club, on Winter Road at East River Road on the island.

The 911 call came just before 12:30 a.m. Saturday from people on shore who saw and heard the man go into the river, Grand Island Deputy Fire Chief John Podlucky told The Buffalo News. “They attempted to throw him a life jacket, and then they lost sight of him pretty quick in that area,” he said.

Podlucky, who didn’t know whether anyone else was on the sailboat at the time, said the man began drifting downriver in the direction of the North Grand Island Bridges. Podlucky and two Erie County sheriff’s deputies were the first to arrive at the yacht club, within minutes of the 911 call. Fire officials soon requested air, land and water assistance from numerous agencies. About half a dozen marine vessels were in the water at the height of the search, Podlucky said, including the Grand Island Fire Company’s rigid hull inflatable boat.

Fifty-five minutes after the incident was reported, the fire company’s marine unit, with a Coast Guard vessel in the vicinity, found Lachapelle unconscious in the river near Buckhorn State Park and Grass Island, about half a mile downriver from the yacht club, Podlucky said. Lachapelle was pronounced dead at the scene after he was brought to an EMS team on shore for evaluation. The Erie County Sheriff’s Office is leading the investigation into the incident.

In a statement Sunday, Sandy Beach Yacht Club Commodore Daniel Tobey said: “The club is fully cooperating with all relevant authorities. We extend our deepest sympathies for the family and crew of the deceased.”