

Paralyzed surfer goes for the big waves

Liesener and 'Surfgimp' team experience memorable moments in Hawaii

By Chris Flood

Delaware State News

MILTON — Other than knowing they had to find a beach with suitable access for a person in a wheelchair, Jay Liesener and his 10-person crew of supporters, affectionately known as Team Surfgimp, didn't know what to expect when they got to Hawaii for a week-long surf session.

"We had really high expectations, but it was so much better than we could have imagined it being," said Mr. Liesener of Milton, a few weeks removed from the trip but still stoked. "There were so many random moments and amazing experiences that fell into our laps."

Mr. Liesener was featured in a Delaware State News article on Nov. 3 because he, and his team, were to be attending the opening ceremony of this year's The Quiksilver In Memory of Eddie Aikau event.

In honor of Eddie Aikau, a big wave legend from Hawaii who died at age 32 in 1978, the event runs during the time of year — beginning of December through February — when the winds have the potential to produce huge waves. It is held only on days of historical surf conditions (35-to 40-foot waves), which happens every three or four years. The last time big wave riding was held was in December of 2009.

Mr. Liesener, known as Surfgimp, was the winner of the event's first ever Hero in the Spirit of Eddie Aikau contest. According to the event's website, 1,765 people entered and it was done as a way to find "those real life heroes who inspire us every day, just like Eddie did and continues to do."

Mr. Liesener's story is one of dreams realized. It shows that with enough motivation and a support group willing to go to extraordinary lengths, a man who has loved surfing since he was boy, but had been confined to a wheelchair for 19 years after a trampoline accident broke his 4th and 5th cervical vertebrae and left him a quadriplegic at the age of 17, can in fact enjoy the freeing feeling of riding a wave at one of the most famous surf beaches in all the world.

"Driving to where we were staying is when it hit me. Coming down the mountains you could see the waves breaking on the outer reefs," Mr. Liesener said after the group arrived to Hawaii. "It was very emotional. That's when we realized that we were actually there."



Submitted photo/Melanie Liesener
Jay Liesener joins three of the world's best big wave surfers, from left, Pete Mel, one of the original surfers of Mavericks in California, two-time world champion Tom Carroll and Ross Clarke-Jones, the first non-Hawaiian to win the The Quiksilver In Memory of Eddie Aikau.

The trip

While it was tough to narrow down the trip to just a few highlights because the trip in its entirety was amazing, Mr. Liesener immediately went to four experiences when asked what was most memorable.

The first happened two days after arriving, when he got to surf in Hawaii for the first time. Because of Hawaii's landscape, finding a beach that was even mildly wheelchair accessible proved to be a task, but after scouting out a couple and speaking with the locals, the group found a beach at Pua'ena Point on north shore of the island of Oahu. It's where they teach the non-surfers and kids, Mr. Liesener said.

"The waves were just perfect, but they were 100 to 150 yards away," said Mr. Liesener, who's used to the shore break offered at his local beaches that range from Indian River Inlet to Assateague Island. "We decided to paddle out and look, and then figured we'd give it a try. It was amazing. It was such a long ride. Each wave was longer than every wave I took this summer combined."

The second experience happened the very next day, when Mr. Liesener and the team got to do their thing with three of the world's best big wave surfers — Pete Mel (one of the

original surfers of Mavericks, a location in northern California known for its big waves and treacherous conditions), Tom Carroll (a two-time world champion) and Ross Clark-Jones (the first non-Hawaiian to win the Eddie Aikau event) — at one of the world's most famous surf beaches, Sunset Beach, home to multiple surfing events every year.

"I was just trying to not act like a crazy idiot fan," said Mr. Liesener. "Growing up these guys were sports heroes, you just hope they're descent people. Then you meet them and they're kind, generous and open with you."

The surf session with the pros went as smooth as possible, except for the very last wave.

As little miscommunication between Mr. Carroll and Mr. Clark-Jones left Mr. Liesener feeling the brunt of a wave on his head. But he thought it was cool.

"Pete was in the group of people closer to the shore in the water and he told me afterwards that he thought he killed me," said Mr. Liesener with a smile. "I figure if I can scare those guys, I've had a pretty good session."

The third and fourth experiences happened at the surfing event's

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Roger Elwood Carmean, 70

MILFORD — Roger Elwood Carmean, 70, of Milford passed away Friday, Dec. 27, 2013. Mr. Carmean was a forklift operator at Seawatch. He was also a truck driver for several companies for 30 years. He was a loving husband, father, and grandfather.

He was preceded in death by his parents, James and Bertha May (West) Carmean; son, Roger 'Kip' Carmean; son-in-law, Tony Legates; and brother, Herbert Carmean.

He is survived by his wife, Frances (Smith) Carmean; daughter, Sandra and Mike Smith of Greenwood; son, Keith Carmean of Dover; grandchildren, Brooke Amber Legates and Shania Nicole Legates; brother, Wilson Carmean of Fredericksburg, Va.; and sister, Eva Evans of Winston-Salem, N.C.

A funeral service will be 2 p.m., Friday, Jan. 3, 2014 the chapel of Berry-Short Funeral Home, 119 NW Front St., Milford, where friends may call after 12 p.m. Interment will be in St. Johnstown Cemetery, Greenwood.

Stella M. Oakes, 82

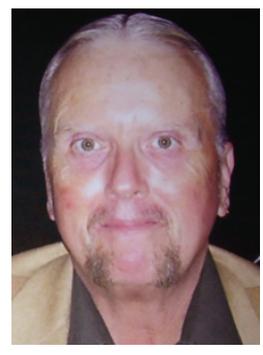
MILTON — Stella M. Oakes, of Milton, passed away Tuesday, Dec. 17, 2013. She was 82.

She is survived by a son, Larry Roberts; and a daughter, Debbie Cournoyer.

Services and Burial will be private.

Robert Earl 'Bob' Everett

MILFORD — Robert Earl "Bob" Everett passed peacefully, Saturday, December 28, 2013 at the Delaware Hospice Center in Milford.



Mr. Everett was born in Milford, on August 29, 1957. Bob was a devoted brother, uncle, and friend to w h o m e v e r crossed his path and a devoted caregiver to his Chihuahua, "Buddy". He took great pride that he had driven school bus, #38, for 9 years for Chambers Bus Company. He loved living in the country near his family and friends and enjoyed hunting, riding his four wheeler, and going to dinner with a special and dear friend, Karen Cooper.

Mr. Everett was preceded in death by his father, Oscar Everett, Jr.

He is survived by his mother, Anna M. Everett; his sister, Lisa Cooper and her husband Mark of Felton; his niece, Wendy Sparks and her husband Greg and their children Sabrina and Addison of Felton; his nephew, Rob Cooper and his wife Alexis and their children Alexa, Aiden, and Ashton, currently stationed in Valdosta, Ga..

Funeral services will be 1p.m., Thursday, Jan. 2, 2014 at Torbert Funeral Chapel (South) 1145 E. Lebanon Rd. (Rt. 10), Dover, DE 19901 where friends may call from 12 p.m. until service time. Interment will be in Sharon Hills Memorial Park Dover.

In lieu of flowers the family suggest that contributions be made to the Delaware Hospice Center 100 Patriots Way, Milford, DE 19963

AROUND THE NATION AND WORLD

In governor races, Democrats eye wage increase

HARRISBURG, Pa. (AP) — Republican governors running for re-election next year are looking to capitalize on distaste for Washington gridlock and President Barack Obama's dropping public approval amid the bumpy rollout of his signature health care law — and Democratic challengers may need to respond with a popular cause.

A minimum wage increase could be the answer.

Democrats vying to challenge a slew of Republican governors, particularly those seeking re-election in states that Obama won last year, are talking up an increase as their campaigns get off the ground 11 months before the election.

Polls say it's publicly popular, it revives the message of economic inequality that Obama wielded effectively last year, and it comes wrapped in a broader jobs and economic message that touches on the top priority of many voting Americans.

In Pennsylvania, championing a minimum wage increase is already popular among the big field of Democrats vying to challenge the re-election bid of Gov. Tom Corbett.

Now, Katie McGinty, a onetime environmental policy adviser to the Clinton White House and Corbett's Democratic predecessor, is distinguishing herself by telling audiences and potential donors that she was the first Democrat in the Pennsylvania field to make it an issue.

Thus far, the Republicans whom Democrats view as most vulnerable aren't changing their minds and supporting it.

In addition to Corbett, the Democrats' list of most vulnerable includes Maine's Paul LePage, Michigan's Rick Snyder and Wisconsin's Scott Walker. Florida's Rick Scott and Ohio's John Kasich might be insulated because their states' laws

boost minimum wage with inflation and Iowa's Terry Branstad, New Mexico's Susanna Martinez and Nevada's Brian Sandoval aren't viewed as sufficiently endangered.

16 killed in suicide bombing in Russia's south

MOSCOW (AP) — A suicide bomber struck a busy railway station in southern Russia on Sunday, killing at least 15 other people and wounding scores more, officials said, in a stark reminder of the threat Russia is facing as it prepares to host February's Olympics in Sochi.

No one immediately claimed responsibility for the bombing in Volgograd, but it came several months after Chechen rebel leader Doku Umarov called for new attacks against civilian targets in Russia, including the Sochi Games.

Suicide bombings have rocked Russia for years, but many have been contained to the North Caucasus, the center of an insurgency seeking an Islamist state in the region. Until recently Volgograd was not a typical target, but the city formerly known as Stalingrad has now been struck twice in two months — suggesting militants may be using the transportation hub as a renewed way of showing their reach outside their restive region.

Volgograd, which lies close to volatile Caucasus provinces, is 900 kilometers (550 miles) south of Moscow and about 650 kilometers (400 miles) northeast of Sochi, a Black Sea resort flanked by the North Caucasus Mountains.

The bombing highlights the daunting security challenge Russia will face in fulfilling its pledge to make the Sochi Games the "safest Olympics in history." The government has deployed tens of thousands of soldiers, police and other security personnel to protect the games.

Surfgimp

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opening ceremony.

After the events, invited riders were blessed on shore and then blessed again out in the water. A local Kahu (essentially a reverend in Hawaiian) named Bill Mitchell saw Mr. Liesener and the team, who were all in water-blue Team Surfgimp t-shirts.

"He came over and I said I was known as the Surfgimp and he was asking all kinds of questions. Afterwards he blessed us all," he said. "There was so much emotion."

Mr. Aikau's brother and sister also spoke with the team and even invit-

ed them to eat at their table during the opening ceremony's dinner after the blessing.

"They said what we were doing is something that Eddie would have liked. There was a feeling of being accepted by them, which was extremely meaningful," said Mr. Liesener. "It was the biggest honor we could ever imagine."

The Aikaus even gave everyone specially-made leis with a note that said they were now hoaloha, which means "beloved friends of the Aikau family."

"That's about as good as it gets," said Mr. Liesener.

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