

# Businesses fund sonar units for six area river, lake rescue boats

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Six public safety departments that undertake water rescues on the Rock River and Lake Koshkonong have received new underwater sonar imaging units for their boats through a fundraiser.

Janesville firefighter and Pike Pole Fishing Guide Service owner Adam Walton organized the funding to present area water rescue first responders with new Humminbird Helix 10 side imaging sonar units.

“These underwater imaging units are the best technology on the market and will help locate possible drowning victims in a faster manner,” he said. “The crystal-clear underwater pictures these units have will also help locate objects such as vehicles, boats and people.”

The Janesville Fire Department, Beloit Fire Department, Fort Atkinson Fire Department, Edgerton Fire Department, Rock County Sheriff’s Department and Rock River Safety Patrol were presented to the new sonar units.

Funds for the purchase of the units came from area businesses along the lake and river.

Pike Pole Fishing Guide Service of Edgerton, Harbor Recreation Marina of Newville, Buckhorn Supper Club of Milton, Carl’s Shell of Edgerton, the Rock-Koshkonong Lake District, Edgerton Volunteer Firefighters Association, Jerry’s Sport Service of Beloit and ACME Tackle of Fort Atkinson each contributed toward the purchase.

All boats will be rigged with these units over the winter and personnel will be trained on their use prior to next summer’s boating season.



## ON THE WATERFRONT

The Fort Atkinson Fire Department is one of six area emergency departments that received a new Humminbird sonar unit for their water rescue boats used on the Rock River and Lake Koshkonong. Funds for the units were donated from area businesses and the Rock-Koshkonong Lake District. Above, some of the donors pose with representatives from the Fort Atkinson Fire Department. From left, they are: Firefighter Mike Lawson, Harbor Recreation Marina owner Mark Richardson, Janesville firefighter and Pike Pole Fishing and Guide Service owner Adam Walton, Carl’s Shell representative Aimee Rutz, Buckhorn Supper Club owner Chico Pope and Fort Atkinson Fire Department Division Chief Mike Lawrence. For more photos [click here](#).

Walton organized the effort after being involved in an attempted rescue of a missing Janesville man that took several days this past July. Police and firefighters were dispatched to the Rock River near Traxler Park at 6:46 p.m. Saturday, July 22, after a report of a man falling into the river and struggling to swim.

Walton said that older model Humminbird sonar units were utilized on the Janesville Fire Department and Rock County Sheriff's Office boats during the search.

"We had some possible hits that we sent people down on, but they ended up being sticks or trees," Walton said. "We just didn't have the clarity."

Search-and-rescue crews were on the water for almost three days.

On the third day, Walton brought in his own boat from his business, which was equipped with the Humminbird Helix 10 SI, the newest sonar unit available.

On the first pass, searchers located two cars in the river that had been passed over multiple times during the search for the missing man and numerous other times during past training sessions. The vehicles had been in the water for some time.

"They just didn't come up as clear objects with these older model sonar units we were running," Walton recalled.

The Humminbird Helix 10 SI is the latest unit available.

"It's kind of like looking at an old color television compared to a high-definition flat-screen television," Walton said in comparing the old and new sonar units.

The tragedy prompted him to think that perhaps it was time to upgrade.

"This is a high-dollar item," he said, noting that the units retail for approximately \$1,800 each.

Initially, the thought was to raise money to provide the Janesville Fire Department a new unit for its boat.

"We quickly expanded it to, 'well, the Rock County Sheriff's Office could use one too,'" he said. "From there, it was determined that, really, all the water-rescue operations on Lake Koshkonong could benefit from the technology."

Walton went door-to-door to the businesses and organizations that are located along the river and related to Lake Koshkonong. Approximately \$6,000 was raised to purchase the new units.

With some discounts made available, the funds were sufficient to purchase the six units and leave money left over for their installation at Harbor Recreation.

Through his business, Walton gives sonar seminars and instruction and does training on how to use and

read the sonar units. He will offer joint training seminars this winter and spring to get rescue personnel comfortable using the units.

“By Memorial Day weekend, everyone will be on board on how to use these units and everything will be operating and up and running,” Walton said.

He said he is excited about what the use of the units will do for water-rescue operations in the area.

“You are talking about potentially not finding a victim for days to hopefully (finding him or her) within minutes,” Walton said. “This upgrade could potentially save lives or help recover victims in a faster manner for closure purposes.”

He noted that in the time immediately after a call, there still is a potential for recovering and reviving a victim; the longer time passes, that chance dissipates.

“Recovery and closure is a huge thing, too,” he said.

A few years ago, Walton was involved in the search for a young girl along the Wisconsin River. Due to the high water and swift current, divers could not be deployed and they were unable to locate her where they thought she was. Her body was not recovered until nearly four months later.

“I can’t even imagine,” Walton said. “That’s why we are doing this. Now everybody will be running the same equipment and we can get out there and do things more efficiently and quicker. There are no borders when it comes to water rescue.”