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Edgerton businessman leads effort to donate new sonar equipment to local rescue teams

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JIM DAYTON
Thursday, November 30, 2017



SUBMITTED PHOTO

A sonar image taken with the Humminbird Helix 10 shows two vehicles buried in the Rock River. The tire shadows on the top vehicle indicate it is upside down. Longer

EDGERTON—Adam Walton held up his cellphone Tuesday at the Edgerton Fire Department and showed reporters a fuzzy, black-and-blue sonar image.

A white speck on the photo was the body of someone who had fallen into water. To the untrained eye, it was nearly impossible to locate



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shadows on one end also show that vehicle is tilted, with the opposite end buried deeper in the mud. Having a clearer picture could help rescue teams save lives or find victims.

the victim.

Walton scrolled to a new sonar image, one as clear as a below-surface shot of

murky water can be. This photo was taken on the Rock River in July, and two submerged vehicles were plainly visible.

Thanks to the donation efforts of Walton and area businesses, six local fire departments and rescue agencies will receive the upgraded sonar technology to replace obsolete equipment.

Representatives from the Janesville, Edgerton, Beloit and Fort Atkinson fire departments; the Rock County Sheriff's Office; and the Rock Koshkonong Water Patrol visited the Edgerton Fire Department on Tuesday to pick up their new sonar units from Walton.

Walton and his business, Pike Pole Fishing Guide Service, spearheaded the fundraiser to purchase the Humminbird Helix 10 sonar equipment.

Harbor Recreation Marina, Buckhorn Supper Club, Carl's Shell, Acme Tackle, Jerry's Sports Center, Edgerton Fire Volunteer Association and the Rock Koshkonong Lake District joined Walton in donating at least \$500 to the project, he said.

The drive raised \$6,000, enough to purchase six units and still have some money left over for installation, Walton said.

The idea originated in July, when emergency personnel spent days trawling the Rock River for the body of missing Janesville man Dakota Giese. The Janesville and Rock County Sheriff's Office boats struggled to produce clear underwater images using their sonar equipment.

Walton, a Janesville firefighter, decided to take out his own personal boat, which was equipped with the Humminbird Helix 10. He quickly found the two long-lost vehicles near the Centerway Dam.

Nov 30



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Department rescue boats had passed that area many times over the years and never discovered the vehicles. It sent a clear message to Walton it was time for the departments to make upgrades, he said.

Chris Krahn, the recreational patrol deputy for the Rock County Sheriff's Office, said the department's sonar unit was 5 years old and could only produce grainy images.

"We could see objects, but we really couldn't see what they were. If you saw a car, it would just be a black box," Krahn said. "You could see the outline of it, but you couldn't make out what it was unless you put divers in the water. This will allow us to see what's down there."

Edgerton's search methods were even more primitive. The fire department relied on "flashlights and eyeballs," Chief Randy Pickering said.

Water in this region of Wisconsin is usually thick with algae. If someone is submerged, it can be very difficult to find them, Pickering said.

It can also be challenging to know where to send rescue divers, he said.

"Prior to this we had no way to see where the victim may be," Pickering said. "It really is kind of hard to describe how big of an advantage this is going to be in a rescue situation."

The new units will give divers a better idea of what to expect below the surface. Walton could identify the submerged river objects as vehicles, and he could tell how deep they were and which direction they faced based on the sonar image.

Divers often can't see more than a few inches in front of their faces when underwater. Giving them a mental map of the area will help save precious time, Walton said.

He hopes each agency will have their sonar units installed by next summer. He plans to hold sonar training so rescue personnel know how to operate the equipment.

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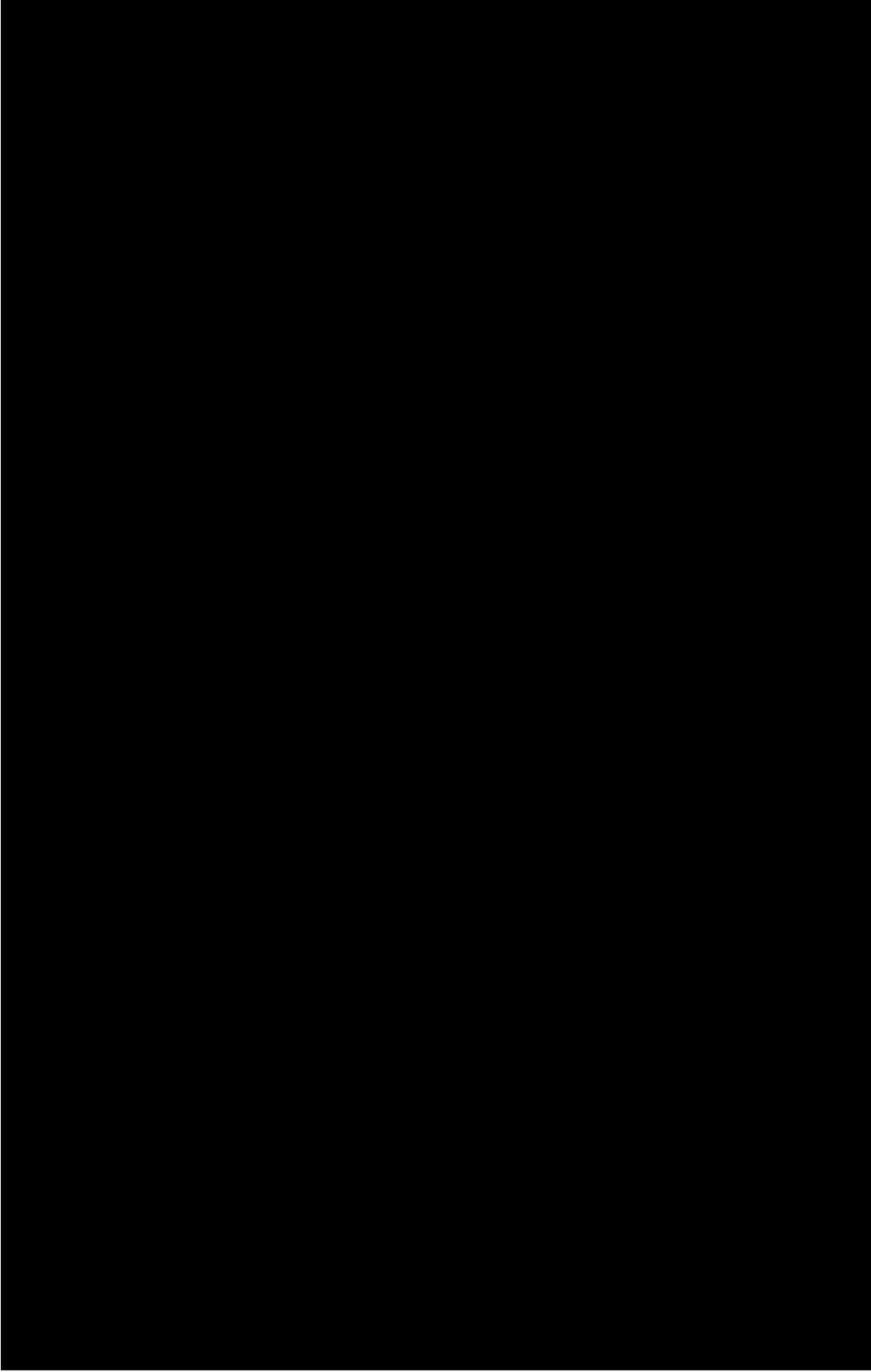
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“This is a huge thing. What this is going to do for water rescue around here, you’re talking about potentially not finding a victim for days to finding them hopefully within minutes,” he said. “This upgrade could potentially save quite a few lives or help recover victims in a faster manner for closure purposes.”



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