

4 on sailboat barely survive Lake Tahoe storm; South Shore marina loses rental boat



A rental boat at Camp Richardson capsizes May 7. Photo/Bob Sweatt

By Kathryn Reed

A skipper with 30 years of experience on Lake Tahoe was barely able to make it to shore safely on Wednesday because of the 4 to 8 foot waves.

Mike Young of Incline Village left Obexer's in Homewood about 2pm May 6 destined for Incline Village, but wound up at Camp Richardson about 7pm. By that time all four on board the vessel had their lifejackets on, the Coast Guard had been called and uncertainty was setting in.

"We were pretty close to the East Shore. We saw one little squall coming across the west to Incline and thought it would blow by and we would be good," Young told *Lake Tahoe News*. "But it filled up fast."

Someone on shore alerted Young that the waves were high and

the wind was howling so it would best to try to land elsewhere.

Young wasn't worried about whether the boat could handle the storm; he just needed a place to dock.

He called the U.S. Coast Guard when he was off Zephyr Cove.

"They said when you are in trouble, call us and we will send a helicopter," Young said.

The Coast Guard, which is stationed in Tahoe City, said the boat was not in distress. Uncertainty, alert and distress are the three levels of search and rescue, according to the USCG. Because the boat was able to sail, it did not need rescuing, according to USCG protocols.

"We are not allowed to give navigational advice," Thomas Hussey, USCG boatswain's mate second class, told *Lake Tahoe News*. This is because if the vessel does not make it, the Coast Guard does not want to be held liable.

Hussey said it was from Camp Richardson personnel that they heard the boat was going to moor there.

Young said the decision was made to head south because that was the direction the wind was coming from.

He turned the sailboat around. At first shelter was found at a cove near D.L. Bliss State Park. Waves were 3 to 4 feet going across the lake. Then he tried to find a nearby buoy, but was unsuccessful so he headed toward the mouth of Emerald Bay.

A call to Camp Rich was made and people there said it was not windy. But that didn't last.

Bob Hassett, who runs Camp Rich Marina, said in a one-hour period the wind at Lake Tahoe Airport measured 5 mph from the southwest and then it was variable before having gusts of 30 mph out of the northeast.

"That is abnormal," Hassett told *Lake Tahoe News* of the 180-degree change. "Then it churned the lake. The waves were from one direction, wind from another and that is where you have troubles."

By the time Young, who was under motor power for this stretch, made his way to the South Shore resort the wind had done the 180 and he said waves reached 8 feet at times.

Camp Rich employees went out in a skiff to retrieve the four from the sailboat. While Hassett said he doesn't like to put employees in harms way, not helping wasn't an option. Young was appreciative of all the assistance the Camp Rich guys provided.

For now the sailboat is on a buoy; waiting for the weather to clear so it can be sailed to its home port in Incline.

In addition to Hassett's employees assisting with rescuing the four sailboaters, Hassett lost one of his rental motorboats and another was damaged, but is salvageable. New, the boat costs between \$30,000 and \$50,000.

Still, the marina operator said he would open for business May 15.