

QUARRY DANGERS

A mother who lost her son hopes She can save others

By SHAWN LEDINGTON
Daily Record staff

Nearly a year ago, just days after her son drowned in the Funkhouser Quarry, Robin Schell vowed she'd try to stop people from going to the 155-acre quarry in Peach Bottom Township.

Schell, 39, has kept her word.

Her 19-year-old son, Jeremy Schell, died July 2 while swimming in the quarry. Rescuers found his body 38 feet under the water's surface.

A few days later, after her son's death, Schell promised

herself, and Jeremy, that she'd do what she could to prevent another death from happening at Funkhouser.

Schell's determination has taken her beyond York County, though; it's taken her across the country.

She's become a national spokeswoman for the U.S. Department of Labor Mine Safety and Health Administration's "Stay Out Stay Alive" educational program designed to warn people against swimming in any of the country's thousands of active or abandoned quarries.

In April, Schell, who lives in Yoe, spoke to fourth-graders in Virginia. She told them there could be risks to swimming in old quarries where there might be barbed wire and machinery sitting on the bottom.

Most recently, though, Schell filmed public service announcements. In the 30- and 60-second announcements, she tells about Jeremy, who became the fourth person to drown in the quarry since 1993. There have not been any other deaths at Funkhouser since his

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Robin Schell of Yoe has filmed a public service announcement, released to television stations across the country, urging people not to swim in quarries. Her son died at Funkhouser Quarry in Peach Bottom Township.

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Quarry

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drowning.

The announcements were released to radio and television stations nationally over Memorial Day weekend, said Amy Louvier, spokeswoman for Mine Safety and Health Administration. It was unknown Wednesday whether any of the stations had plans to air the commercials. Schell hopes to call each station on the list to try and persuade them to air the announcements.

Less than a month after Schell died, Jason Peterson of the Philadelphia area fell at least 100 feet at Funkhouser. His 24-year-old body tumbled down the rocky cliff and landed face first in 6 inches of water. Among the injuries he suffered were three broken vertebrae in his neck and a dislocated shoulder.

Peterson, now 25, also has become a spokesman for Mine Safety and Health. The Havertown, Delaware County, man said he didn't grow up near any quarries so he had no idea of the dangers he faced when he and friends came to York County to swim.

"It was almost the last thing I did alive," he says in his announcement.

In his ad, he wears a massive neck brace and tells people not to go to an old quarry because they might not be as lucky as he was to come out alive.

Schell said Tuesday she hopes her efforts will go even further than they have already.

"I know it's worth it," she said, adding that she believes Jeremy is still with her, helping her reach so many people.

"He knew how to get things done," she said.

Funkhouser Quarry is a popular site for young people to



Jason Peterson broke bones in his neck and dislocated his shoulder when he fell in Funkhouser Quarry in Peach Bottom Township. 'It was almost the last thing I did alive,' he says in a public service announcement.

swim and socialize despite the fact that it's illegal to be on the privately owned property. The breath-taking rock cliffs and crystal blue waters lure people from near and far, especially out-of-towners from Maryland and Delaware.

Schell placed a cross at the Atom Road side of the quarry where most trespassers enter.

"It hasn't been removed yet," she said, adding that she never heard back from the quarry's owners who promised to help her to put up a memorial to warn trespassers of the dangers.

Glenn Gayski, managing partner of Slate Ridge Limited Partnership, the Maryland company that owns Funkhouser, did not return calls this week. Gayski said previously that Slate Ridge buys quarries, fixes them up and then sells them back to the state. He said last summer the company had been "actively planning for a couple of years to try and develop the quarry."

The quarry hasn't been in operation since the 1960s. "No Trespassing" signs are posted around the property, but people have ignored them. They also ignore blockades, up to \$300

finer for trespassing and towing charges for parking on nearby Atom Road.

The 200-year-old slate quarry became the topic of discussion last August among state and federal organizations interested in quarry safety. Officials from the Mine Safety and Health and a Pennsylvania quarry company discussed what to do about the dangers. Since the quarry is privately owned, federal officials are limited in what they can do to prevent people from going there.

State Police Cpl. Luke Spaseff said Tuesday police have made some arrests since the warmer weather hit this year. But on Memorial Day, the first official day of summer, no one was caught by police at the quarry.

Spaseff said police will continue to patrol the property as they have in past years and give citations that have maximum fines up to \$300 and/or up to 90 days in jail.

As for the public service announcements, Spaseff said, "we appreciate it."

"The less people we have to pull out of there, the happier we'll be."

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