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Construction Workers Save Children From Sinking SUV

LAST UPDATE: 7/9/2004 12:05:02 AM

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Two small children are alive tonight, thanks to the quick work of three local construction workers. They were in the right place at the right time, and saw an SUV sinking in a pond, with the two and four-year-old trapped inside. The dramatic rescue unfolded in a new subdivision under construction in Verona. Local 12's Paula Toti reported how the men put their own lives on the line, to save the children.

The children's mother was just feet away from the muddy pond. She had pulled up to the site of their new home, which was under construction. She turned off her engine, and got out with the children still inside the SUV. Somehow the break released, and the trouble began.

The Durango, carrying the children, started rolling down the hill, hit some lumber and continued into the water.

"The truck continued going over the hill, I took off running after the truck," says Gerald McDaniel, who rescued the children.

McDaniel was one of three bricklayers working in the area. Vernon Egan noticed the truck rolling, after he saw Gerald running.

"I couldn't believe how far it went, it had to be going 40 miles per hour, and I was thinking they weren't going to make it. My boots were wet, like 20 pounds a piece," Egan says. By this time, the mother, who happens to be pregnant, heard all the commotion. When Vernon tried to pull the youngest child from the vehicle, the boy didn't want to go. "He was glued to the window, fear in his eyes, he didn't know what to do, at two-years-old," Egan says. The boy finally let go after seeing his sister rescued. But there was another snag.

"His leg got caught on the door, I put my left leg up there, trying to pull him out," Egan says.

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As soon as the boy was free, the vehicle sank. Vernon went under water too, and for a time feared for his own life. Somehow everyone made it to shore.

"If we weren't there, you'd probably be talking about a death right now."

The other worker who dove in and helped is Andy Fitzpatrick. Their boss gave them the rest of the day off. The mother told the men they were her heroes, to which the men replied they were just happy to help.

Boone County rescue says it's not sure what caused the brakes to fail, and that it's unusual for an SUV to stay afloat as long as it did.

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