

# GLoucester-MATHEWS GAZETTE-JOURNAL

## Local Girl Scout leader puts her training to use to save man from drowning

by Sherry Hamilton - Posted on Apr 03, 2013 - 11:07 AM



*Girl Scout leader Sherri Sliker of Gloucester is credited with saving a man from drowning recently at a camp near Franklin. She is shown here at the Girl Scout camp on Burkes Mill Pond in Gloucester. Photo by Sherry Hamilton*

Gloucester Girl Scout Troop 1427 co-leader Sherri Sliker stayed true to the Girl Scout motto "Be prepared" two weeks ago when she helped save a man from drowning.

A waterfront supervisor and leader of the canoe program for scouts at the Burkes Mill Pond Camp in Gloucester, as well as an American Red Cross small craft safety instructor,

Sliker spent Saturday, March 23, leading an outdoor certification class for adult scout leaders at the Colonial Coast Council's Camp Darden near Franklin.

The group was learning to prepare lunch over an open fire pit at the pond-side camp when someone mentioned a noise they had all been hearing in the background. Sliker said it was a yelpy sound, as though a neighbor at one of the homes across the pond were repeatedly calling a dog, but Sliker was so intent on teaching the class that she hadn't paid much attention.

Then suddenly the quality of the sound changed, and someone said, "there's a 'p' on that sound—somebody's calling for help."

Underbrush obscures the pond from sight in the area where the group had gathered for lunch, said Sliker, so Nevin Bunnell, a trainee from the Southside, climbed up a tree to see what was going on and saw a man holding onto a jon boat on the pond. With the water a frigid 40 to 45 degrees, everyone knew they needed to hurry.

Bunnell called for some rope and Sliker headed to a garage-style structure where canoes and life vests were stored. As she rushed there, she gave directions to her trainees, sending one to stay with the campfire to make sure it didn't get out of control, telling another one to call the camp caretaker and get him there to unlock the garage, getting someone to call 911, and sending someone to the water's edge to reassure the victim and make sure he stayed conscious.

Fortunately, said Sliker, there were canoes on an outside rack and the garage was unlocked. As she ran to grab paddles and life vests, Bunnell and another trainee pulled a canoe off the rack and put it in the water. Bunnell and Sliker jumped in and paddled out to the middle of the pond, where they found Harvey Randall, 64, of Portsmouth visibly shivering, with only his shoulders and head sticking out of the water.

Randall said in a telephone interview Tuesday that he had gone fishing for speckled perch crappie for a couple of hours while his son and grandson went to an Easter egg hunt.

"Wasn't anybody looking for me," he said.

He'd caught about a half-dozen fish and turned to put the last one in the live well in his boat when the bolts in his seat came undone and he was pitched overboard. He grabbed the boat and began calling for help. A life vest was in the boat, he said, but he was wearing a goose down coat that was so heavy he couldn't let go of the boat to reach for it because "if I let up, I was going to go sinking like a rock." Regardless of that, he had decided that, since no one seemed to hear him, his only option would be to try to swim to shore. Fortunately, that didn't turn out to be necessary.

Sliker said she grabbed the jon boat to steady both vessels as Bunnell stepped over into the boat and began pulling Randall out of the water. Randall was able to get his foot

hooked onto the edge of the boat and, with Bunnell's help, he rolled himself over the side.

Sliker and Bunnell helped Randall out of his coat and into a dry coat that a trainee handed to Sliker. Then Bunnell started the small trawling motor on the jon boat and headed to shore with the victim as Sliker, with the help of another trainee who had paddled out, collected fishing gear and other items from the water.

Sliker said nurse practitioner Poppy Tansey monitored Randall's vitals until the ambulance arrived.

Asked if he thought he could have made it to shore swimming, Randall said "that was something I didn't want to try and find out." He said he was grateful to everyone who helped with his rescue, and that he sent a contribution to the Girl Scouts on Tuesday.

It was the first time in her 25 years of service that Sliker has ever had to use her Girl Scout skills to actually rescue a person, and she has received a lot of press attention over it. Asked how she felt about the rescue, she said only, "I'm glad we were there."

According to [www.girlscouts.org](http://www.girlscouts.org), the 1947 Girl Scout Handbook explains the organization's motto by saying, "A Girl Scout is ready to help out whenever she is needed. Willingness to serve is not enough; you must know how to do the job well, even in an emergency."