

## **Sheriff working to resuscitate volunteer dive team**

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WILKES-BARRE – When County Sheriff Michael Savokinas won the election, one of his promises was to re-emphasize support for volunteer public-safety programs.

Last week, he started to make good on that promise by attempting to reinvigorate the dive team, whose membership and enthusiasm Savokinas said had withered.

“It existed, but it wasn’t used,” Savokinas said.

About two dozen people showed up to a meeting on Monday night to reorganize and schedule training sessions.

The dive team will assist in rescues, body recoveries and searches for evidence where water is involved, Savokinas said. Though other regional fire departments have dive teams, the now 18-member sheriff’s dive team would expand and strengthen resources.

A major benefit is that all equipment and work is volunteered. “It costs the sheriff absolutely nothing except the insurance,” Savokinas said.

Former county Sheriff Carl Zawatski, who attended the meeting, was pleased to see the team, which he had supported, return to the standing it once had.

“If you tried to keep something like this and paid them, you wouldn’t be able to afford it,” he said.

Dive team members usually have a law-enforcement background along with diving experience, and receive background and records checks, he said. The team has rules and regulations on authority, he said, and “if we get any indication they’re not abiding by it, they’ll get thrown off the team,” he said.

Paul Mierzwa, a Newport Township firefighter, is acting as the liaison between the team and Savokinas. He said the organization is excited to be appreciated again and that many former members have returned. The group is scheduling training sessions for early June.

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