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21-year-old feared drowned after swimming in choppy Lake Pontchartrain



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Scott Satchfield / Eyewitness News

Email: ssatchfield@wwltv.com | Twitter: [@satchfield](https://twitter.com/satchfield)

NEW ORLEANS -- What began as a fun visit Tuesday to Lake Pontchartrain for a group of friends ended in tragedy.

They decided to go swimming in the area of the lake near the UNO campus, but amid choppy waves and strong winds, one of them -- 21 year old Kswany Chavez -- went under and never resurfaced.

The trouble began when an inflatable device they were using began to drift away.

"The individuals attempted to go and try to retrieve the flotation device, whatever it was. Unfortunately, two of the individuals got into distress. One of the individuals tried to rescue the other, but unfortunately, he went under water," said NOPD Spokesman Frank Robertson.

Crews made up of NOPD and Coast Guard personnel searched for several hours.

As a chopper circled in the skies overhead, boats dredged the lake bottom along the shoreline.

Conditions were so rough on the lake that police officials scrapped a plan to send divers into the water.

Friends say Chavez jumped in to help another young man but began to struggle and panic.

William Alexander Mambrano said he then jumped in to try to save Chavez -- his roommate and best friend.

"(Kswany) swallowed too much water. The waves were just beating his face. Then he just starts going down and I try to pull him up. I start swallowing water, and next thing you know, I just felt him slip out of my hands and he was gone," Mambrano said. "He gave up his life to save somebody else's and I just wanna find him."

It's the latest of several similar incidents in Lake Pontchartrain over the last few years -- a reason the NOPD once again delivered a warning.

"There's signs posted. No swimming in Lake Pontchartrain. None whatsoever," Robertson said.

Crews suspended their search Tuesday evening, but will resume Wednesday at 8 a.m.