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## Surprise party honors fisherman for saving 4

By HELEN NIEMIEC  
STAFF WRITER

Ken Conrad came home with only a single walleye but had a much bigger haul from his fishing trip.

He and fishing partner James Treadway saved four men from drowning in the frigid waters of Lake Erie on April 17.

While Conrad of Birmingham didn't seek any spotlight for the efforts, one of the survivors — Paul Martin of Davison — called the Birmingham-Bloomfield Chamber of Commerce and thought some sort of tribute was necessary.

Resolutions from the Birmingham City Commission, state Sen. Michael Bouchard, state Rep. John Jamian and the U.S. Coast Guard arrived in time for a surprise party last week at Alban's for Conrad, engineered by his wife, Dorothy.

She managed to keep the occasion a secret from her husband, though more than 40 attended the party. At the Birmingham City Commission meeting preceding the party, Conrad wondered why there were so many of his friends in the audience and wasn't quite sure until the commission presented him with a tribute.

Martin presented Conrad with a life preserver as part of the tribute. "I'd like to give a life saver to a real life saver," Martin said.

Borothy Conrad assembled the four men plus friends and family.

"It was very nice getting a chance to talk to the survivors and to mix with old friends," she said.

Conrad and Treadway, who lived in Birmingham until he retired several years ago, were trolling that Sunday afternoon when they spotted something in the water just as they were planning to head back to a harbor less than a dozen miles from the Ohio border.

■ 'It was very nice getting a chance to talk to the survivors and to mix with old friends.'

Dorothy Conrad

It was a cold day, with the air temperature in the lower 40s, the water temperature at 45 degrees and waves between 4 and 5 feet. It was nearly 1 p.m. and both Conrad and Treadway were getting ready to turn back when Conrad spotted something in the water.

"My first thought was that it was a blue heron with a broken wing. That's when I got out the binoculars," Conrad said.

In fact, Conrad spotted John Troscio, Jr. waving Troscio along with Martin, Mike Sweet and Lloyd Rond were treading water since their 15-foot boat had sunk. The men were about a mile and a half out from Luna Pier.

Conrad and Treadway sped to the men, jockeyed their boat so it would be in a good position, set it in idle and then both went to the task of pulling in the cold and waterlogged men.

"When we got them in the boat, we saw what condition they were in. I'd guess they had another two to five minutes if they stayed in the water. That would have been the end," Conrad said.

They raced to the shore, stripped the men of their wet clothing, put layers of dry, warm clothes on and put them in the car with the heater running. An ambulance came within minutes and took the men to the hospital, where they were treated for hypothermia.

U.S. Coast Guard Captain J. D. Burk acknowledged the significance of the deeds of Conrad and Treadway.

"You may very well have been their only hope since Mr. Martin was unable to transmit a radio distress call before his boat com-

pletely swamped," Burk wrote. Bouchard told Conrad that his act was heroic and resulted in saving four lives.

"Thanks for your efforts in making our waters a safer place," Bouchard told him.

Conrad said April 17 was a day filled with ironies. He and Treadway, fishing partners for 20 years now, generally went out on Saturdays but that day chose a Sunday. They usually head back by noon but were still out at 1 p.m. And they usually head straight east from their docking spot but that day headed south.

Conrad, a boater since he was 10, said the tributes given them "much ado about nothing."

"We didn't do anything that anyone else wouldn't have done if they saw them," he said. "Our only thought was to help them."

Treadway suffered a separated rib from the incident.

Conrad saved a life once before, though it was in his Scout days. A fellow Scout fell through the ice and Conrad got him out.

The Birmingham man said he's learned about boating from his father as a boy. His parents and he would head to the North Channel in Muscomb County and explore those waters and fish.

He's seen calm and not-so-calm waters, learning what needs to be done in all those instances.

"The more you're on the water, the more respect you have for water. If you have that respect, it's a wonderful sport," Conrad said. "You need to exercise common sense, watch the weather, watch the conditions and know your equipment."

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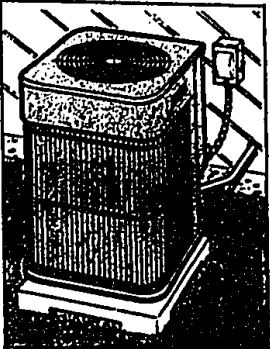
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