

COMMUNITY

Fire Rescue helps family retrieve wheelchair from lake

SUBMITTED STORY

Wylie Fire Rescue assisted a family with an unusual dilemma at Lake Lavon Aug. 8.

Ina Freeman, a 92-year-old Garland resident, was enjoying a Saturday at the lake with her three children, Theresa Freeman Collins and Rochelle Martino, also of Garland, and Thaddeus Freeman of Largo, Fla. The family had camped at Lake Lavon the night before.

On the East Fork ramp, Freeman's daughters assisted in transporting her from her wheelchair to a flotation device in waist-deep water.

"I turned back to get their chair," said her son, Thaddeus Freeman, "only to discover to my dismay it was gone. It had slipped into the murky waters of the lake."

Collins said it was quite a moment

when they realized it was gone.

"The boat ramp was closed, so we had parked quite far away and rolled her down the ramp. We started to wonder how we would get her back up to the car!"

While the siblings searched the water for the chair, trying to locate it by feel and with their feet, Wylie Fire Rescue Capt. Brandon Gibson and firefighters Travis Araujo, Jared Buckmeier and Jimmy Johnston arrived for their usual weekend test of water rescue equipment. They were checking out the rigid inflatable boat when Freeman approached them.

"I finally got up enough nerve to go ask the department if they could help us find and retrieve the lost wheelchair," he said, adding that he felt "sheepish" at having lost the chair.

Battalion Chief Brian Ritter said the firefighters were glad to assist.

"They are members of the Special Op-



Photo submitted by JUDY TRUESDELL

Wylie Fire-Rescue helped find Ina Freeman's wheelchair that rolled into Lake Lavon.

erations Team, and these guys love a challenge," he said.

Using the rapid diver setup, with which each WFR Quint fire truck is

equipped, Araujo performed a basic search pattern and was able to locate the wheelchair — 40 feet from where it entered the water.

"The guys admitted they were all very surprised at how far that wheelchair traveled down the ramp ... under water," Ritter said.

"The locks weren't on the wheels, so it did have free motion," Collins said. "We were shocked it had traveled so far."

She said the whole adventure took about 45 minutes, with the firefighters only taking about 15 once they got in the water.

"This is kind of a feel-good story," Collins added. "You don't know how good we felt when they handed us back that chair."

Information provided by Judy Truesdell on behalf of the City of Wylie.



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