

Authorities: Driver in quarry deaths admits smoking marijuana

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A Geneva man accused of driving drunk into a Naperville quarry early Saturday morning, causing a crash that drowned two of his friends, is being held on \$250,000 bail, authorities said Sunday.

Michael Szot, 21, and a former leader of an anti-drinking club at Geneva High School, would have to pay \$25,000 to get out of DuPage County jail before his next court appearance to face charges of aggravated DUI and reckless homicide.

Szot is accused of losing control of the 2007 Chevy Impala he was driving west on Aurora Avenue at Eagle Street near downtown Naperville at about 1:45 a.m. Saturday. The road curves southwest at that intersection, and Szot is accused of failing to navigate the curve, crashing through several trees and a chain-link fence and plunging the vehicle into Naperville Park District's Paddleboat Quarry.

Mihirtej Boddupalli, 21, of Lisle, and Sajaad Safiullah Syed, 21, of Naperville, were unable to escape the car as it sunk, authorities said. Divers recovered their bodies.

"Early yesterday morning, two young men tragically lost their lives because of a very bad decision made by an alleged drunk driver," DuPage County State's Attorney Robert Berlin said in a news release Sunday. "People have got to learn that DUI crashes are not accidents and are 100 percent avoidable by not drinking before you get behind the wheel of a car."

Authorities said Szot's blood alcohol content was above the legal limit of .08 when he was arrested after the crash and he "admitted to smoking marijuana earlier that day." Szot was found in possession of a marijuana pipe, Berlin said.

Szot's next court appearance is scheduled for Aug. 11 in front of Judge Kathryn Creswell. He's charged with four counts of aggravated driving under the influence of alcohol causing the death of another person and two counts of reckless homicide.

Judge Timothy McJoynt set Szot's bail at \$250,000 Sunday, although prosecutors were seeking \$3 million.

Szot was arrested Saturday after being treated at Edward Hospital where his two passengers, Boddupalli and Syed, were pronounced dead.

According to minutes of a Geneva High School board meeting from 2010, Szot was co-president of SADD, or Students Against Destructive Decisions, and helped plan Red Ribbon Week, which encourages students to be drug- and alcohol-free.

Friends were remembering Boddupalli and Syed as news of the crash spread Saturday.

The two were graduates of Naperville North High School, according to their Facebook profiles. Boddupalli was a student at Northwestern University and Syed attended Indiana University.

"They were really loved by their graduating class and this is a significant loss," said Kendra Benner, a fellow 2011 graduate of Naperville North High School. The two were both members of the boys cross country team in high school, she said.

Benner said she thought it was insensitive that the quarry where the accident happened was reopened to boating and other activities less than 12 hours after the crash.

Boddupalli's family declined to comment Saturday afternoon. Syed's family did not immediately return a call seeking comment Sunday.

Syed, who went by the nickname "Jazz" among his friends, would have been starting his senior year at Indiana University in the fall.

"He was one of the funniest people we knew," said classmate Raul Lopez, who was a Sigma Alpha Epsilon fraternity brother with Syed.

Syed had recently been elected to the position of public relations chairman for the fraternity for the upcoming semester, Lopez said.

"It's just completely absurd that someone would drive a car while under the influence," Lopez said. "We are all really grieving his loss. It's a little bit unreal that someone can just be gone like that."

The crash remains under investigation.

- Daily Herald staff writers Eric Peterson and Susan Sarkauskas contributed to this report.