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NEWS LOCAL

Two Timmins teachers drown while vacationing in Mexico



By Alan S. Hale, The Daily Press
Friday, March 18, 2016 3:42:24 EDT PM



Steve Eley participating in a trash pick-up with the South Porcupine Lions Club in 2011

Grief counselors will be on-hand at Roland Michener Secondary School when students and staff return from their March Break because there are two members of the school community who will not be.

The school's guidance counselor Susan Drummond and her partner Steve Eley – himself a retired social studies teacher at Roland Michener – both died while vacationing at a resort in Tulum, Mexico.

Vice-chair of the District School Board Ontario North East Bob Brush worked with both for many years during his own time teaching at Roland Michener. He offered his and the school board's condolences to the couple's families and said losing them will leave a void at the school.

"This is a big loss for the fabric of Michener," said a somber Brush. "They were both excellent teachers and very committed to the students, whether they were teaching them or just part of the student body. They were very active in school life, which is why there will be a very serious void after this loss."

According to Brush, Drummond started her career initially as English teacher before moving on to be the head of student services and a guidance counselor.

Eley was a fixture at the school for many years and his exploits as a teacher were sometimes reported on in The Daily Press. For instance, two weeks after the 9/11 terrorist attacks he and other social studies teachers held special classes to dispel myths about Muslims, and how Osama Bin Laden was not representative of an entire people.

Brush says that the school board will take every step it can to support the school community while people grieve.

“Our emergency response team will be at Michener first thing on Monday morning to assist students and staff. Whatever their needs are, we will be there for them,” he confirmed.

The Daily Press has reached out to the Ministry of Global Affairs and the Canadian Embassy in Mexico looking for official word on how the couple died, but neither has responded yet.

Media reports from the Tulum region say they drowned while swimming at the beach in front of the Gran Bahia Principe resort where they were staying.

According to the Riveria Maya News, Mexican officials believe that Drummond suffered a cramp while swimming in rough waters and began to struggle. Eley tried to help her but was also overcome by the large waves.

Their bodies have been recovered, and arrangements are being made by the Canadian Consulate to have them brought back to Timmins.

