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### The Modesto Bee

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# Ceres man confirmed dead in Mexico boating accident

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A Ceres man has been confirmed as having died when a Mexican fishing boat filled with U.S. tourists capsized in the Gulf of California.

Leslie Yee, 63, was among 27 fishing enthusiasts who were thrown overboard in the middle of the night Sunday during a freak storm.

Two Twain Harte men — Mark Dorland, 62, and Al Mein, 61 — also were on that boat and remain missing. Two Sonora men and a man from Ripon who were on that trip have been rescued and are safe.

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- Twain Harte man among missing after boat capsizes in Mexico



Yee's Ceres family was told the bad news by the U.S. Consulate on Monday. His body reportedly was identified by two close friends who were on the trip with him

"He was a good man," said his sister-in-law Felicia Marte of Modesto. She said he was a retired transportation manager and the father of three. He had lived in Ceres about six years.

There's been no other confirmed deaths, but news about the tragedy is coming out in bits and pieces at a time as survivors call home to tell about the ordeal

The Ripon man on the boat, Joseph Beeler, 59, spent 15 hours on the water before being rescued, his wife said this morning.

After he went into the water, he grabbed an ice cooler to stay afloat, then spent hours adrift on a panga boat with a friend before being rescued by the U.S. Coast Guard, according to Theresa Beeler.

"He was very fortunate," she said. "We're so thankful. This has been quite a harrowing experience."

Mexican rescuers were scouring the Gulf of California today for seven missing tourists.

Joseph Beeler told his wife that a storm blew in about 2:30 a.m. Sunday, and he was thrown from his bed. He told her that he and everyone else had about a minute to get off the boat before it capsized.

He said he had just enough time to put his pants on. He said once he was in the water, life jackets, ice coolers and the panga boat — a smaller boat used by fishermen — emerged from the sunken larger vessel.

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He and a friend were able to turn over the panga boat and climb inside. The boat had no power and no oars, leaving them unable to navigate in pitch black and windy conditions.

Beeler, an avid fisherman, was on the trip with his friend Pete Zuger of Novato. The two had wanted to take this trip the last couple of years, and this was the first time space opened up.

Mexican navy, army and state officials met late Monday to discuss the search and there were reports they would call off rescue efforts. But instead they announced the search would continue over an extended

The U.S. Coast Guard sent a C130 fixed-wing aircraft that can stay in the air longer and search farther than the helicopter it used Monday, said Petty Officer Levi Read.

Three helicopters from the navy, the state of Baja California and the city of Mexicali were searching today, said Baja California state Civil Protection Director Alfredo Escobedo Ortiz.

Ortiz said authorities are considering requesting deep-water divers from Mexico and the United States who can search the wreckage, which is in water more than 200 feet deep.

Theresa Beeler said her husband told her it was possible there were some who weren't able to get out of the boat because they could have been injured by the initial jolt.

Mexican navy Capt. Benjamin Pineda Gomez said that with the warm weather and water temperature in the Gulf of California, it's still possible that the missing tourists are alive.

"A person who casts away can survive many days. That sea is calm," he said.

Murphy Ikegami had no idea that her husband's fishing expedition had taken a tragic turn when the phone rang late Sunday night. Her husband. Lee Ikegami, was calling his wife in San Martin to say his group's boat had capsized in a sudden storm and that he was safe.

However, Lee Ikegami told his wife that two of their friends were missing: One of those friends was Yee of Ceres."I was in such shock," Murphy Ikegami said.

Lee Ikegami, 66, told his wife that he was tossed into the water and found himself very close to a life raft. "There's an angel on his shoulder," Murphy Ikegami said.

In an email statement, Baja Sportfishing said: "We are devastated by this horrible tragedy. Every effort is being made to assist the authorities in the search. Our thoughts and prayers continue to be with the families '



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#### Maureen Webster

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