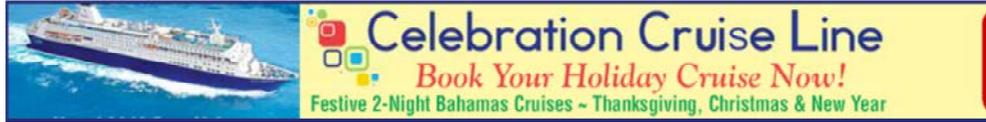




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## Orlando couple killed in sand-buggy accident while on cruise to Mexico

Jim Melillo and Susan Borges died Nov. 17 in Cozumel, Mexico.

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Friends discuss Jim Melillo and his longtime girlfriend, Susan Borges accident and relationship

By Bianca Prieto, Orlando Sentinel  
11:19 a.m. EST, November 20, 2012

Jim Melillo and his longtime girlfriend, Susan Borges, planned to spend part of their weekend vacation with friends exploring Cozumel, **Mexico**, in a sand buggy when tragedy struck.

The two were killed when the buggy they were riding in collided with a guardrail in a secluded part of the island Saturday afternoon. Their friends, driver Wagner Ferreira and his wife, Liz, suffered injuries that were not life-threatening.

The gregarious Orlando couple who were known for their philanthropic work with many Central Florida charities died at the scene. Melillo, 39, was thrown from the vehicle, while 41-year-old Borges remained trapped in the back seat, according to friends who witnessed the accident.

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"It was surreal, like a scene from a movie," said Seliena Crampton, who was riding in a different buggy in front of the couple and saw the crash unfold. "This is a tragic accident."

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Crampton said a group of about 28 friends set off Saturday afternoon in a caravan of sand buggies to enjoy a six-hour tour that included lunch and swimming on a private beach in Cozumel. They were part of a larger group on a **Royal Caribbean** cruise to the small Mexican island.

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Shortly after the tour began, the buggy Melillo and Borges were riding in with the Ferreras broke down and had to be replaced.

Group members noticed many of their buggies seemed to be ill-kept and had no seat belts, Crampton said.

Around 1:30 p.m., Crampton was using her cellphone to record the beach scenery as the caravan putted along a straight stretch of paved road. She turned to record the buggy behind her — carrying the Ferreras, Melillo and Borges — when she noticed the cart suddenly veer toward the metal guardrail.

Crampton said she dropped her phone as she realized her friends were about to crash. The group stopped and ran to give aid. Several people in the group attempted CPR and were joined by two vacationing critical-care nurses who happened upon the accident.

But it was too late.

Melillo and Borges were among 40 friends who cruise together annually and were on Royal Caribbean's Liberty of the Seas on a four-day trip to Mexico. The sand-buggy tour was not sanctioned by the cruise line.

Mexican authorities conducted an investigation into the deaths and the crash but found no fault, said friends who were on the trip. Mexican news reports suggested Ferreira and his wife have since returned to Florida.

had been arrested and was being held in jail there, but that was refuted by friends. Ferreira and his wife have since returned to Florida.

Two days after the crash, friends of the couple have rallied together to help their grieving families and one another. Numerous fundraising events are being scheduled to help the families, who are incurring significant costs because of cremation and transportation back to the United States.

Services are tentatively planned for next week, but no details were available Monday.

Friend Nicole Rego said she found out about the accident shortly after the crash Saturday when she began receiving phone calls and text messages from friends about an "emergency" in Mexico.

She immediately sent a text message to Melillo to make sure he was OK but never heard back. Minutes later, she found out her friends had died.

"He had a love for life, a love for people and always put others first," Rego told the Orlando Sentinel on Monday. "He was a jokester."

About five years ago, Rego set up Melillo and Borges on their first date. Borges, a corporate recruiter for the **Cheesecake Factory**, and Melillo, an engineer at Trane, hit it off immediately, she said.

Afterward, Borges called Rego to thank her for the introduction and said she had the time of her life. The couple were inseparable after their first date, Rego said.

Rego and Borges liked to discover new wines, cook together and host dinner parties. The women were forced to hide plates of food from Melillo before the parties started so that he wouldn't eat all the food, Rego said, smiling at the memories.

The couple were not married and did not have any children but had a dog named Trixxxie, who is now being cared for by family members.

"They intended to be together forever," Crampton said. "They loved each other."

A memorial fund has been set up and donations can be made at <http://www.jimandsusanfund.com>.

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