

Deadly Delta Accident Takes Lives of Four

By Alex Breidler, Record Staff

The moon was out, the winds calm and the water still as the 14-ft. fishing boat floated down pencil-straight Grant Line Canal.

"It was a beautiful night," said Korrine Flowers, Oasis Marina-Resort owner, where the boat was launched. "There is no excuse for what happened," she said.

The aluminum boat was swamped under the weight of its 10 occupants early June 21; six swam to shore, and four drowned. The last two bodies were recovered the morning of June 23.

Observers said it was the deadliest single boating accident on the Delta that they could recall. In one night, one of California's premiere boating destinations saw as many deaths as it might in one year or longer.

"It's ridiculous. That shouldn't have happened," said Brian Healy, manager at Paradise Point Marina.

What went wrong? A boat that officials said could hold a half-dozen people was packed with 10. There were no life jackets, investigators said. And finally, alcohol was suspected to be a factor.

Sheriff's investigators released the names June 23 of two of the victims, 27-year-old Jesus Torres and 25-year-old Kimber Tomas. Two more were not publicly identified. All the men are said to be from Oakland.

The boat's operator, 43-year-old Daniel Martinez Cordova, was arrested on suspicion of vehicular manslaughter and boating under the influence of alcohol. He was held at the San Joaquin County Jail.

The group arrived at the marina that day to launch the boat, Flowers said. One man came to the office to pay a launch fee, and the group was gone.

Boating safety notices are posted around the marina, warning of

the dangers of overloading boats, among other issues, Flowers said.

"We never know how many people are going to be on a boat," she said. "They just launch in the water and do their own thing."

Conditions that night were ideal, she said. And Grant Line Canal is perfectly straight, with no obstructions.

Campers along the canal heard screams around 1 a.m. and called 911. The Coast Guard and sheriff's officials searched the narrow waterway, finding four bodies over two days.

"This was an unfortunate accident waiting to happen," said Healy, the Paradise Point manager, who has worked on the Delta for 15 years.

Most Delta boating deaths, he said, involve collisions - a boat plowing into a personal watercraft, perhaps. When boats are swamped, people who are properly equipped with life jackets should be able to

make it to shore with ease, Healy said.

"It's not like you're out to sea somewhere," he said.

Few of the men on the fishing boat could swim, sheriff's officials have said.

The number of boating fatalities in California has dropped steadily over the years. In 1980, 112 people were killed; in 2006, 42 deaths were reported, according to the California Department of Boating and Waterways.

The Delta saw five fatalities in 2006 and six the previous year, but only two each in 2003 and 2004.

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