



Teenager's death spurs town to act

Danville officials seek to prevent further accidents on bridge abutment at park.

By R. Joseph Gelarden

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The day after a high school freshman lost her life when she fell from a 50-foot-tall concrete bridge abutment, Danville officials scrambled to fence off the structure and put up warning signs.

Town Manager Gary Eakin ordered workers Monday to encircle the structure with bright orange plastic snow fencing. He also placed a rush order for new warning signs.

Laura Elizabeth Rudie, 14, died Sunday of massive head injuries after she slipped from the top of the structure on the east bank of White Lick Creek in Ellis Park. She fell onto a pair of massive boulders.

Town officials met Monday to discuss what to do about the dangerous structure.

Park Superintendent Brad Andrews said in the past the town has posted a series of signs on the abutment warning of danger.

"We have had lots of (warning) signs up, but kids take them down and throw them in the creek. We can't keep them up," he said.

Town officials say they are trying to find a more lasting solution.

"There is some talk about knocking it down, but it is secured into that hill pretty good," Andrews said.

"It would be expensive, and we are not sure who is responsible for it," he said.

Mike Neilson, president of the Danville Town Council, said officials have asked an expert to make a risk assessment of the structure.

"We have to get together and talk about our options. We want to do what is best and discuss a permanent solution," he said.

"But we are just sick, heartsick," said Neilson, a social studies teacher at Danville Community High School, where the victim was a freshman.

Aja Rossman, 25, fell from the abutment in 1997. She said it is time for the town to do something to protect the children.

"It is dangerous. We tried to get it torn down when I was 18 (at the time of the injury)," she said.

Rossman said she and her lawyer, Rick Schultz, considered filing a suit against the city to help her pay for medical bills but decided against it.

She said she and two friends were messing around and should not have been climbing on the structure when she fell.

"I was from Clayton. There is not much to do (there) except cow tipping," she said.

Danville officials say the structure is dotted with graffiti left by daring

teenagers seeking a thrill.

"Kids climb on it all the time. We try to keep them off there, but they still do it," Andrews said.

On Monday, Zach Doyle, 10, who attends South Elementary School in Danville, and his friend Myles Goodman, 13, were playing on the creek bank.

Zach said he had been in the park Sunday and witnessed the accident.

"She was sitting at the top, and she fell down and landed on the spikes," he said.

Authorities rushed to the scene but were unable to save Laura's life.

Jason Matthews, the Hendricks County coroner, said the victim landed headfirst on the boulders, which have metal reinforcement bars protruding from them.

The abutment is all that is left of the bridge that once carried electric interurban trains from Indianapolis to Danville on the Terre Haute, Indianapolis and Eastern Traction Co. line.

The structure was opened in 1906 and abandoned in 1930.

Funeral services for Laura Rudie are scheduled for 11 a.m. Thursday at St. Augustine Episcopal Church in Danville.

Visitation will be from 4 p.m. to 8 p.m. Wednesday at Weaver Funeral Home in Danville.

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