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NCK Tech student a life saver

By **RICK HORN**

The Call

Caleb Amundson doesn't consider himself a hero, but others do and they told him so.

Amundson, an 18 year-old student studying heavy equipment operation at NCK Tech, saved a man from drowning Labor Day Weekend at Harlan County Lake in south-central Nebraska.

"I went home and decided to visit family at the lake and do some jet skiing and fishing," he said, recalling the events of that day. "I had just loaded up my jet ski and this guy was backing in a 35-foot pontoon boat next to me."

Amundson remembers thinking at the time what a big boat the man had. Amundson said everything seemed routine until he heard the brakes on the man's truck begin to give and chirp. The pickup truck and boat trailer jack-knifed and in a flash the trailer snapped. The sudden crash sent the pickup truck, boat and trailer — with the man still inside — careening down the boat ramp and into the water.

The out of control vehicle sideswiped Amundson's truck as it slid toward the water.

"The guy was still in the truck and his wife and sister came running up screaming 'he's paralyzed from the waist down,'" Amundson said. "I'm a member of the volunteer fire department back home but I've never had any water rescue training."

Without any hesitation, Amundson jumped in the water in an attempt to free the man from his vehicle.

He said the truck was beginning to sink in about 10 to 15 feet of water and Amundson tried to open the driver's side door of the pickup but couldn't get it open because of the force of the water.



Caleb Amundson, from Fairbury, NE, saved a handicapped man from drowning at Harlan County Lake in Nebraska over Labor Day Weekend. His Dodge Dakota pickup was slightly damaged in the

He said the driver was struggling to free himself from a specially designed wheelchair that sat in the pickup behind the steering wheel. He said the man had the windows open on the Silverado quad cab. Then in a second, he said, the truck simply sank, sucked in by the weight of the water.

Amundson then followed the truck down, diving and feeling his way in the murky water.

"I couldn't see anything," he said. "I first felt the mirror and then I felt the man's hand. I grabbed his forearm and yanked him out."

Amundson later learned the man lost strength in his arms while operating the hand controls for the brakes. "He just couldn't hold it any longer," he said.

Amundson said the man was in shock when he got him safely to shore. "We got him a life vest he could rest his head on," Amundson said. "After that I just sat back. I think I might have been in shock myself."

He couldn't remember the man's name during the interview for this story, but he remembers the man's wife coming up to him after everything had settled down.

"She talked to me," he said. "She thanked me and called me a life saver. I just did what anyone else would have done. If I hadn't been down there it would have been a different story."

A U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' project covering 31,000 acres, with 13,250 acres of water surface, Harlan County is Nebraska's second largest lake. It is located in the south-central part of the state, seven miles from the Nebraska/Kansas state line

Harlan County Sheriff's Deputies identified the man Amundson rescued as Troy Balderson of Beaver City, Neb. Deputies said the pontoon boat drifted to shore during the ordeal and the trailer was still attached to the pickup when authorities pulled it from about 12 feet of water.

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