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Questions remain in the death of local real estate man Jack Tent

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By PHILLIP BANTZ

Sentinel Staff

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The search-and-rescue teams hunting for a Keene man were ready to head home Sunday evening when a blue patch appeared in the snow.

"They originally thought it was a blue tarp," said Keene Deputy Fire Chief Mark R. Boynton. "It was just some blue in the snow."

That blue patch turned out to be John D. "Jack" Tent's jeans.

Tent was dead when the searchers found him just before 7 p.m. in a wooded area off a popular snowmobile trail about 300 feet from his home at 55 Summit Ridge Road, according to Keene Deputy Fire Chief Mark F. Howard.

A well-known Realtor with Better Homes and Gardens The Masiello Group in Keene, Tent will also be remembered for his volunteer work with the Keene Lions Club and many other civic organizations.

Tent's estranged wife, Stephanie, reported him missing Sunday around 3 p.m. after she saw footprints in the snow behind his house leading to the trail, police said. They said no one had seen Tent since Saturday.

The Keene Police Department initially searched for Tent with one of its police-dog units for about an hour, but a heavy snowstorm prevented the dog from picking up on a scent.

"When they lost their leads on that end of it, it was decided that we would send our crew in to check the general area," Howard said.

Three firefighters, including one with extensive knowledge of the trails, set out on a Polaris off-road vehicle. They had covered about 5 miles before they found Tent.

"It was actually the last general area the crew was checking," Howard said. "He was located on a secondary trail system between the rail bed and Summit Road."

While the primary trail had been heavily traveled by snowmobilers, there were no tracks or footprints near the area where Tent's body was discovered, Howard said.

Tent, who had no visible injuries, was wearing a winter jacket and work boots and had no supplies, Howard said.

He said Tent was not dressed appropriately for a hike in frigid temperatures, especially during a storm that was dumping about an inch of snow an hour when the search ended.

"He had no gloves," Howard said. "He didn't have a hat."

The state medical examiner in Concord performed an autopsy Monday on Tent, but was unable to determine his cause and manner of death, according to a spokeswoman.

The medical examiner is awaiting the results of a toxicology screen and other forensic studies, which could take up to three months, before making a final determination in Tent's case.

While the cause of Tent's death remains a mystery, police have said they do not suspect foul play.

Tent's friends and business associates, meanwhile, are reeling from the tragic incident.

"I've known Jack since the early 1970s. He was just a really nice guy. He was very generous," said Ron A. Farina of Keene. "He's definitely going to be missed. It's such a great loss."

Farina said he answered a phone call Friday from Tent.

"A lot of what we talked about is confidential," he said. "I can tell you that he seemed to be in good spirits."

Farina said he got a call from Tent's wife Sunday afternoon.

"She wanted to know if I knew where he was. I think she called a lot of his friends," he said. "She seemed worried."

Farina said he did not know where Tent's wife was living. Attempts to reach her have been unsuccessful.

Phillip Bantz can be reached at 352-1234, extension 1409, or pbantz@keenesentinel.com.

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