

# Tragedy befalls Worcester as officer, 14-year-old boy drown in pond

By Camille Caldera and Jack Lyons Globe Correspondent, Updated June 4, 2021, 9:19 p.m.

Worcester police officers and other residents gathered for a vigil to honor Officer Enmanuel Familia. ERIN CLARK/GLOBE STAFF

WORCESTER — A five-year veteran of the Worcester Police Department and a 14-year-old boy drowned in a pond in the city's largest park Friday afternoon after several officers went into the water to help a struggling swimmer.

Officer Enmanuel “Manny” Familia, 38, was a husband and the father of a son and a daughter, Worcester police Chief Steven M. Sargent said at a late afternoon news conference outside police headquarters.

Worcester police officer Enmanuel Familia.

Sargent did not identify the teen. He described the deaths as “two unimaginable, devastating losses.”

“The Worcester Police Department has lost a brother, friend, and a partner. The city of Worcester has lost a hero,” Sargent said. “We will remember and honor his selfless devotion to Worcester and his ultimate sacrifice to save someone he didn’t know.”

Police received several calls around 1:35 p.m. reporting a person possibly drowning in the pond in Green Hill Park, Sargent said. Officers and firefighters arrived at the pond to find several people in the water, including a male near the pond’s center who was reaching an arm up and struggling, the police chief said.

Rescuers went into the water and brought two people out but then realized that one of the police officers was missing.

“It was now apparent that we had two victims,” Sargent said.

One witness, Ayeh Tanteh, told WHDH-TV that she watched from shore as an officer went into the water, brought two youths out, and then several officers went back in for the other boy.

“One of them, like, got sucked right into the water,” Tanteh said. “The others came out. They were telling him, ‘Get out! Get out!’”

Familia was found at 2:28 p.m. He later died at a local hospital, Sargent said. The teen was found at 3:25 p.m. and taken to a local hospital, where he was pronounced dead.

A diver was also taken to the hospital for minor injuries, and the other officers who went into the water were taken to the hospital for observation.

The tragedy in Worcester came on the same afternoon that two police officers in Braintree responding to a domestic disturbance were [shot by a suspect](#) in what authorities described as an “ambush.” The injured officers were in surgery at nearby hospitals. In the exchange of gunfire, a Braintree K9 dog, Kitt, was killed, as was the suspect.

In Worcester, Green Hill Pond is at the center of the city’s largest park, which includes playgrounds, a petting zoo, a golf course, and the Massachusetts Vietnam Veterans Memorial. The pond measures 30 acres and is surrounded by gazebos and picnic tables.

At Familia’s home in Worcester, a police officer turned reporters away Friday evening. Relatives did not immediately respond to interview requests.

Worcester Mayor Joseph M. Petty said the city’s “hearts are heavy as we mourn the deaths of Worcester police Officer Enmanuel Familia and the young person he tried to rescue.”

“Officer Familia died tragically in the line of duty, doing what he was trained to do,” Petty said at the news conference. “This was the type of person that Manny was: someone who would lay down his life for someone else’s child.”

City Manager Edward M. Augustus Jr. spoke of “the devastating loss” of Familia and the teen who drowned.

“There are no words to express how difficult this loss is,” he said. “God knows this city has had more than its share of loss. I know I speak for every person in this city when I say that our hearts are broken and our collective prayers are

with Officer Familia's entire family ... as well as with the other victim of drowning today."

On Friday night, the American flag outside police headquarters hung at half-staff, and black bunting was draped across the front of the building, where a message is inscribed in large brass letters: "In valor there is honor."

Nearby, dozens of police officers and local residents huddled with striking nurses outside St. Vincent Hospital for a candlelit vigil. Weeping men and women stood arm in arm or rested a head on another's shoulder as they stood with electronic candles and Thin Blue Line flags to salute the fallen officer.

Familia had attended Quinsigamond Community College and worked there as a campus police officer in 2013 before going to work for Clark University police and then Worcester police, the college said in a statement.

In a 2016 video celebrating the graduation of Familia's class from the Worcester Police Academy, he thanked his family for supporting him through the challenges of his training.

"If it wasn't for them, I don't know what I would be doing at this point in time," Familia said of his wife and children. "They motivated me; they stuck by me throughout the past six months. And my wife, thank you for taking care of me, day in and day out. You have made my lunch, breakfast, dinner, everything. So in reality, you're the real MVP."

By late afternoon, the area surrounding the pond had emptied, save for a handful of journalists and a few curious onlookers.

"This is where it happened," one man said in a hushed tone.

Stragglers were quickly shooed away by officials attempting to close the park for the night. As the sun began its descent, the water glistened, still and silent.