



## Man Almost Drowns; West Point Lake Collects Life Jackets

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Lawrence told News Leader 9 that he almost drowned at West Point Lake. He now knows the importance of a life jacket.



By: Taylor

**Barnhill** WEST POINT, Ga. (WTVM) -- West Point Lake is on a safety streak, but on Sunday, May 11<sup>th</sup>, the lake's two year zero drownings record was almost broken.

May 13, 2008

Buck Lawrence, along with his wife and brother, was camping at West Point Lake for the weekend. When Lawrence's boat got away from him on Sunday afternoon, Park Ranger, Fred Matthies came to assist him in retrieving it.

"Mr. Matthies tried to give me a life jacket, and I procrastinated.... So I dove in. And I'm fighting against the waves coming this way. And I had such a pain in my chest to where it was unbearable. I just knew I was fixing to die," Lawrence told News Leader Nine.

And Buck Lawrence would have died, if it hadn't been for the help of Ranger Matthies.

West Point Lake Ranger supervisor, David Barr said, "Mr. Matthies coached Mr. Lawrence to swim on his back and try to get his breath and regain some energy so he could try to swim back to shore."

"Mr. Matthies sent me a line out there. And if he hadn't, I would not be here today," Lawrence recalled.

Ranger Matthies followed the West Point Lake's safety motto of "reach, throw, but never go". It is taught to campers in the case of someone potentially drowning. They encourage rescuers to reach for the victim, throw something out for them to grab on to, but to never jump in after them for the fear of being pulled under.

"Ranger Matthies did exactly what he was trained to do and ultimately in the end, it saved Mr. Lawrence's life," Barr said.

After being saved, Buck Lawrence not only learned that his life was more precious than his boat, but he also took away an important piece of advice: "Don't forget to get a life jacket. I mean, always use that life jacket."

The West Point Lake Water Safety Council has teamed up with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to make the lake safe for kids too.

The organization is asking for your assistance in donating children's life jackets that are in good condition.

The council has set up "loaner stations" all over the park's property with life jackets for families to use at no cost.

If you can't make it out to West Point Lake to drop off a jacket, the Goodwill store and the Salvation Army in LaGrange as well as Troup County Fire Departments are collecting the life jackets.



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