

DEADLY DISTRACTION

The First 72 Hours

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The Call

- ▶ June 10, 2016 at 1956 hours
- ▶ Aitkin County receives 911 calls reporting a hit and run injury crash
 - Callers indicate 9-11 year old girl hit
 - Might be dead
 - Possible suspect vehicle – white Ford pickup pulling 5th wheel trailer

The Response

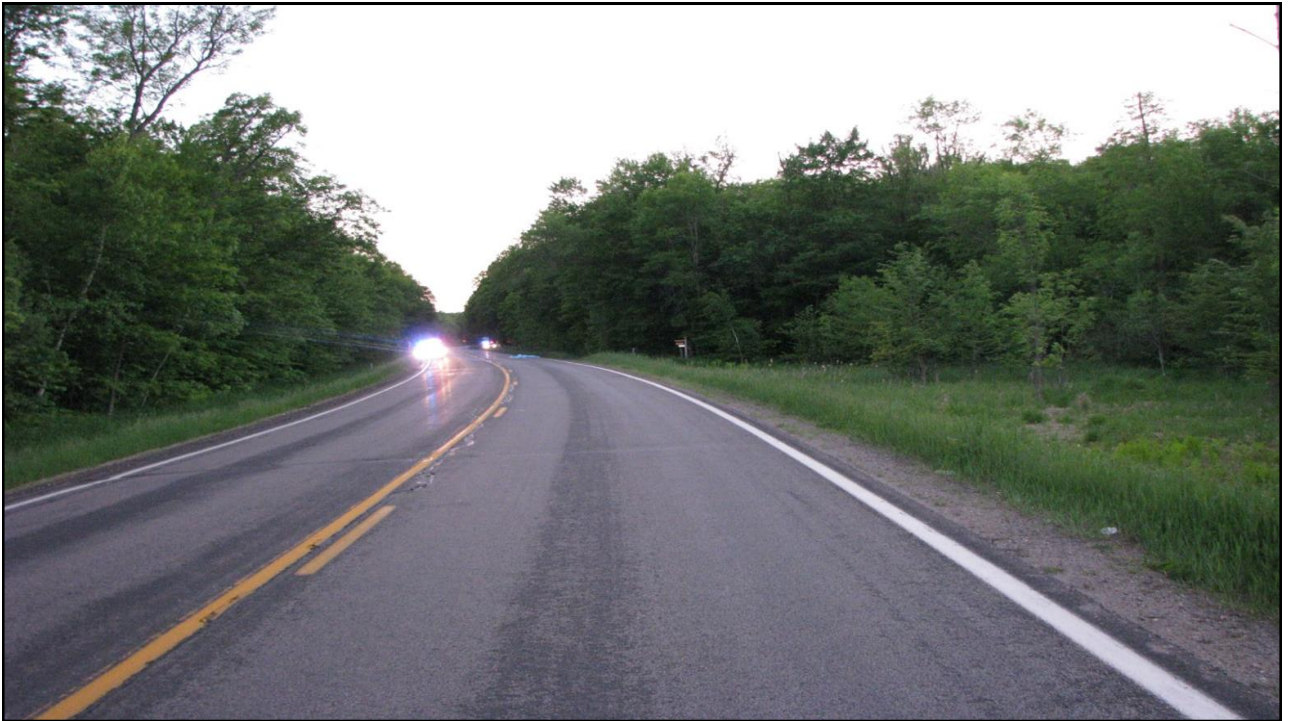
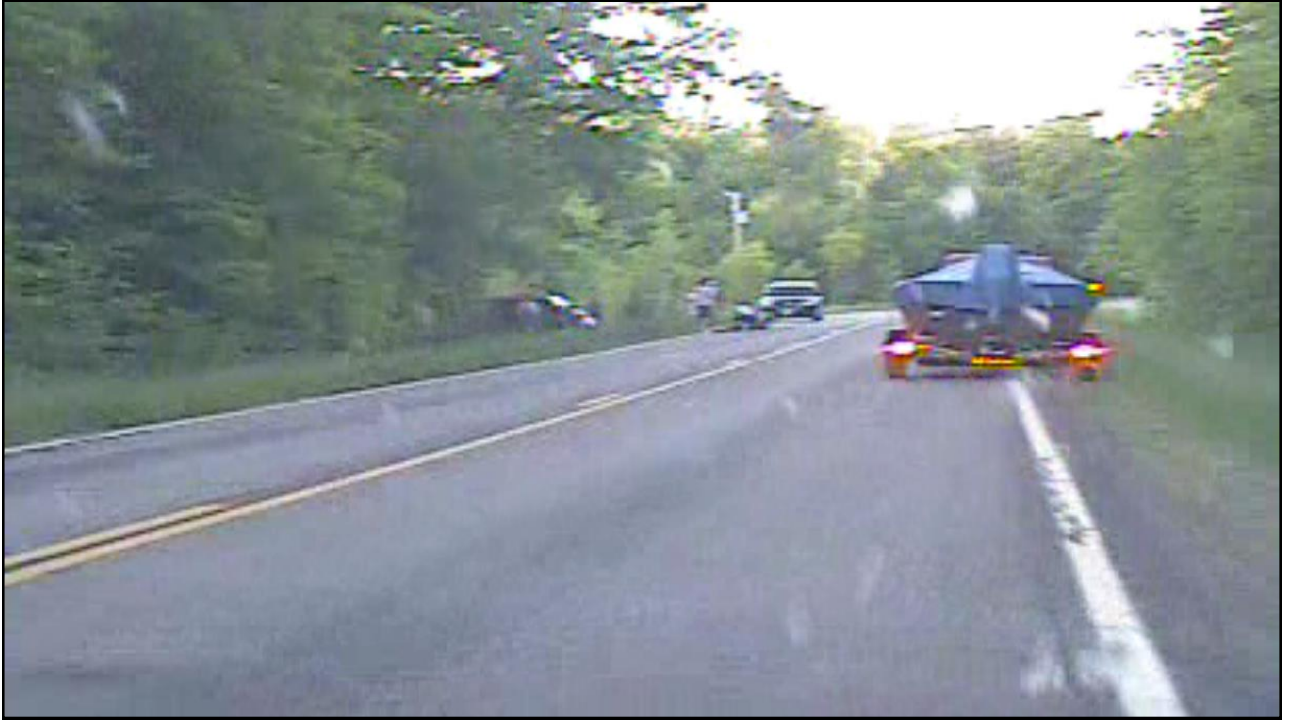
- ▶ Troopers, Deputies and EMS responded
 - Law Enforcement initiated multiple traffic stops while in route to the scene
- ▶ State Patrol District Investigator was called out for investigation – Sgt. Lance Turcotte
- ▶ State Patrol Accident Reconstruction Specialist was called out for crash reconstruction – Trp. Dion Pederson
- ▶ State Patrol Supervisor responded to the scene – Lt. Adam Fulton
- ▶ MNDOT personnel were called out to block the highway

North end of Mille Lacs lake



The Scene





Preliminary information

- ▶ Great Uncle heard a loud bang, saw a white Ford pickup pulling a white camper.
- ▶ Niece (Caylin) was by the road using her cell phone.
- ▶ Called 911
- ▶ No witnesses
- ▶ No vehicle parts
- ▶ Locate a sandal scrape near the fog line– area of impact

Day 1 – Saturday

First 24 hours

- ▶ Phone calls/tips start around 0600 (Troopers cleared the scene around 0300)
- ▶ Day cars notified of the situation
- ▶ Lt. Benz and Trp. Fredericksen
 - Printed flyers in squad
 - Went to businesses looking for video
 - Spoke with numerous people in public
- ▶ Public provided with a TIP line

Day 1 – Saturday

First 24 hours

- ▶ Lt. Benz and Trp. Fredericksen follow a video lead
 - Sees possible suspects travel westbound Hwy 18 to southbound Hwy 169
 - Brainerd PD locates the suspects on video in Brainerd
 - Crow Wing Sheriff's Deputies see the suspects on video entering BIR
 - 1300 Sgt Turcotte and Trp Pederson interview the drivers and obtain dried blood samples from the trailers
 - Receipts viewed

- ▶ Cell Tower Warrants

Day 2 – Sunday

First 48 hours

- ▶ Lt. Benz and Trp. Fredericksen following up on leads

- ▶ Talking to the public
 - Door / camper knocking
 - Encounter a person that:
 - saw a maroon Tahoe towing a white camper
 - a female driver with at least 1 kid in the vehicle
 - Wisconsin plates
 - Video shows Tahoe travel south on Hwy 169 from Hwy 18

Day 3 – Monday

First 72 hours

- ▶ 0645 – Lt. Benz and Trp. Fredericksen notice a maroon Tahoe connected to a camper with Wisconsin registration at Myr Mar Resort

- ▶ The Troopers speak with a male and female separately
 - Stated they arrived around 2000 Friday evening
 - She was driving the Tahoe with a bumper pull camper
 - He was driving a Jeep pulling a boat / trailer combination
 - Did not see anyone on Hwy 18
 - Did not run over anything except maybe a turtle or two

Day 3 – Monday

First 72 hours

- ▶ Photos
 - Tahoe
 - Camper
 - Jeep
 - Trailer and boat
- ▶ Camper does not appear damaged, undercarriage relatively clean
- ▶ Casual conversation after formal statements reveals
 - Male appears anxious and sweaty
 - The female shows no remorse but stated she has a history of enabling people

Day 3 – Monday

First 72 hours

- ▶ BCA help requested
 - Agents, Lab testing and crime scene (if needed)
 - Morning– BIR vehicle samples rushed to the BCA
 - Afternoon– BIR vehicle test results – Not human

- ▶ 1600– Provisional Autopsy and photos
- ▶ 1700 – Victims’ cell phone found inside the residence

- ▶ Starting to get reports she may have been sitting on the shoulder, near the fog line

Day 4 – Tuesday

- ▶ Aitkin Deputies, BCA Agents and MSP meeting
 - Working 2 Hit and Run fatal crashes (both from 6/10/16)
 - Organize and prioritize case resources

- ▶ Surveillance videos, door to door interviews, cell tower warrants, phone calls and business interviews

- ▶ Videos given to MSP, but can’t be viewed

Day 5 – Wednesday

- ▶ The Great Uncle is re-interviewed at the residence
 - thought Caylin was in the bathroom
 - thought she was on her cell phone by the highway
 - thought she was picking up rocks (some were in her pockets)
 - No new info

- ▶ Witness “saw”



Day 5 – Wednesday

- ▶ Numerous reports that Caylin was sitting down near the fog line

- ▶ Sgt Turcotte recalled a report from Benz / Fredericksen
 - Meier was pulling a boat trailer that had right side damage
 - Meier claimed the damage was from when he had a tire blowout
 - People through the area prior to Meier/Chandler reported seeing Caylin
 - Meier/Chandler said they saw no one



Day 6 – Thursday

- ▶ Sgt Turcotte is able to view surveillance videos (2 days to get access)
 - Able to verify vehicle descriptions of reporting callers
 - Vehicle drivers that saw her alive and after she was hit
 - Vehicle descriptions that were reported
 - 2.2 miles east of the crash site – closest vehicle in front of Meier/Chandler was 1 min 25 seconds and there was a 1 min 41 second gap after them
 - The driver after them was the first on the scene
 - *Remember– Meier/Chandler didn't see anyone

Day 6 – Thursday

- ▶ Medical Examiner photo
- ▶ MSP trailer tire photo

MSP obtains/executes a search warrant for the boat and trailer



Day 6 – Thursday

- ▶ S/A Jaeche and Sgt Turcotte go to the metro to interview the suspects
- ▶ Meier 1st–
 - Said Chandler saw a lady on the road but he didn't see her
 - Meier didn't swerve, go off the road, hit or run anything over– no bumps
 - Boat went into 2 different lakes that weekend
- ▶ Chandler 2nd–
 - Admitted to lying at the campground
 - Thought it was a deer then realized it was a lady
 - Didn't see Meier swerve or hit anything (about 15 yards in front of her)
 - She had to move over to avoid the lady
 - She felt horrible for not stopping and guilty for not telling the truth

Day 7 – Friday

- ▶ BCA boat and trailer results
- ▶ Verbal report only at this time
 - Suspected fabric imprint on the grommet by the marker light–passenger trailer tire area
 - Obvious wiping/scrubbing on the passenger side of the trailer, underside of the wheel well (passenger side)
 - No wiping/scrubbing on the driver side
 - Diamond plate foot step held on by velcro and underneath it was wiped/scrubbed
 - Blood was located on the passenger side of the trailer

Day 7 – Friday

Difficult to see, but there is an imprint on the lower right.





Day 7 – Friday

- ▶ Search Warrants
- ▶ Jeep, Tahoe, Camper, Meier cell phone, Chandler cell phone search warrants obtained
 - State Patrol initiates traffic stop with the Tahoe that now has new WI plates
 - Chandler not alarmed she was stopped regarding search warrants
 - Chandler says she wants to cooperate and that she hoped we found out who ran over that little girl – this prior to knowing what the search warrants were for
- ▶ All search warrants were sealed after their execution to prevent data from being released during the investigation

Day 10 – Monday

On Sunday, BCA– Tested 1 sample and it resulted in a DNA match for the victim

After checking with the Aitkin County Attorney, decision is made to arrest Meier and Chandler in Hastings

Chandler provided a statement, slightly changing it from before

Meier requested an attorney

Transported separately with audio/video the entire trip

Day 10 – Monday

- ▶ Statement from mother of juvenile passenger in Chandlers' vehicle
 - Says daughter texted her saying they saw a dead body
 - Mom didn't think much of it
 - Mom agrees to interview on Tuesday
 - Tuesday morning, mom says State Patrol not allowed to speak with daughter

Day 12 – Wednesday

- ▶ State Patrol obtains search warrants for juvenile passenger cell phone and her mothers' cell phone
 - Numerous locations listed on the search warrant:
 - Residence, registered vehicles, any vehicle they were in, any premises they were found in and on their person
- ▶ Warrant served at their residence
 - Mom no security code, provided juveniles' security code voluntarily

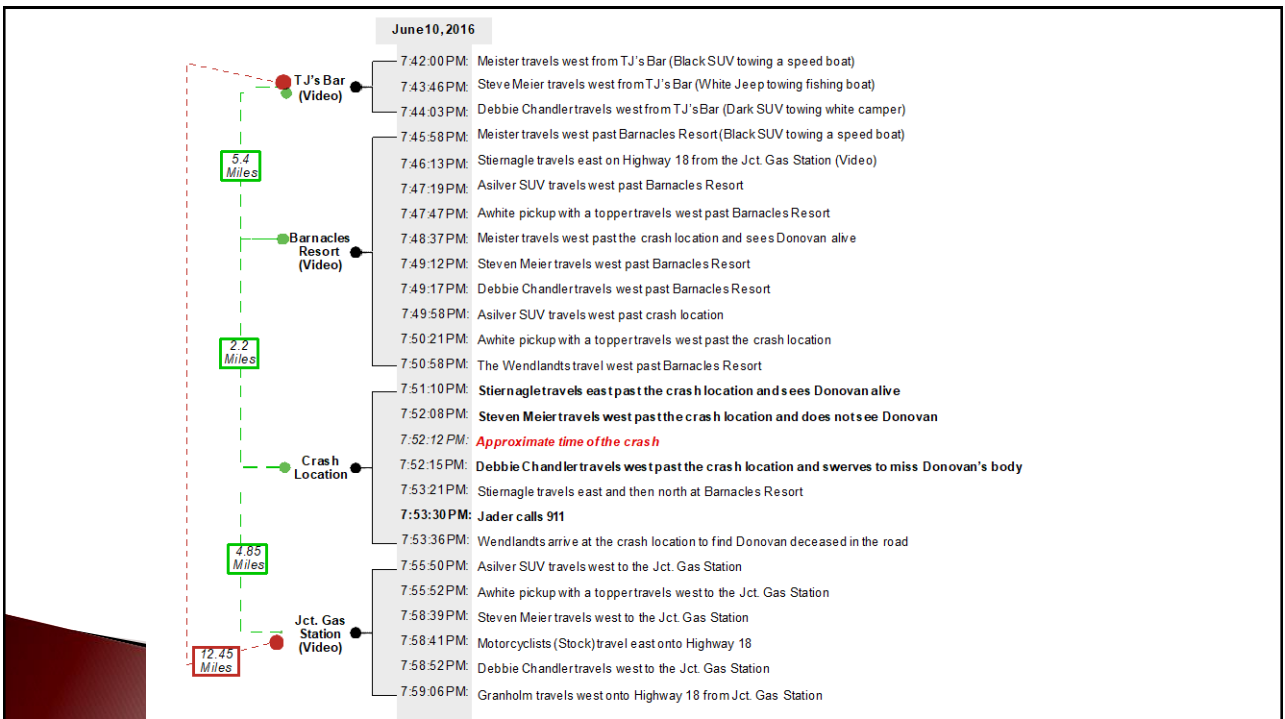
We are 16 mins away 7:37 PM			
8:05 PM Awesome.. be careful..love you	Sent	No sereously	Yes
Ok we are her but we saw a Dead person on the side of the rode 8:06 PM	Read	Come on?	Yes
8:06 PM What?	Sent	Well we think	Yes
Ya			
8:06 PM Well we think	Sent	Ya	Yes
8:06 PM Come on?			
No sereously	Read	What?	Yes
Ok well I have to go love you 8:07 PM			
I miss u mom 9:42 PM	Sent	Ok we are her but we saw a Dead person on the side of the rode	Yes

Timelines – Show suspect was there

- ▶ Video from businesses
 - 2 east of the crash site
 - 1 west of the crash site
- ▶ Most vehicle/owners identified (they called in)
- ▶ Tracked them across Highway 18
 - Average speed
 - Estimated time at the crash site

Importance of Time

- ▶ The actual 911 call time was critical in completing the investigation
- ▶ I learned of the discrepancy while working on the timeline
- ▶ On June 10
 - Aitkin SO reports indicate 1956 hours
 - MSP reports indicate 1958 hours
 - Aitkin Dispatch indicates the 911 call was placed at 19:55:30
 - *The 911 machine was actually 2 min slow– true time was 19:53:30*



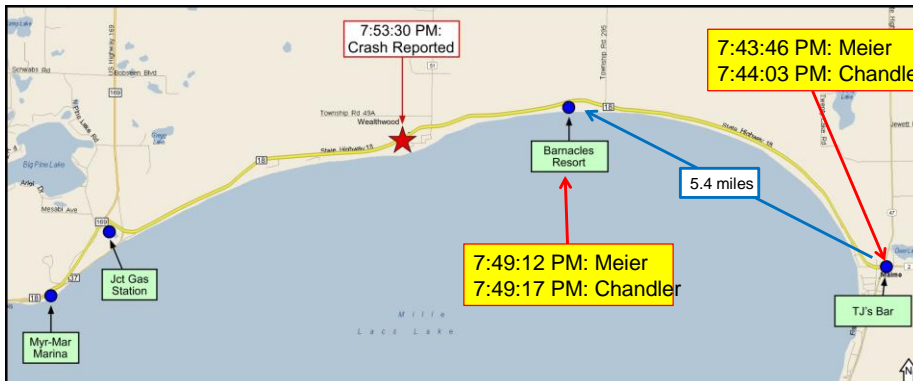


TJ's Bar (Video):

7:42:00 PM: Meister travels westbound (Black SUV towing speedboat)

7:43:46 PM: Steve Meier travels westbound (White Jeep towing fishing boat)

7:44:03 PM: Debbie Chandler travels westbound (Dark SUV towing white camper)



TJ's Bar – Barnacles Resort (Video):

7:45:58 PM: Meister travels westbound past Barnacles Resort

7:47:19 PM: A silver SUV travels westbound past Barnacles Resort

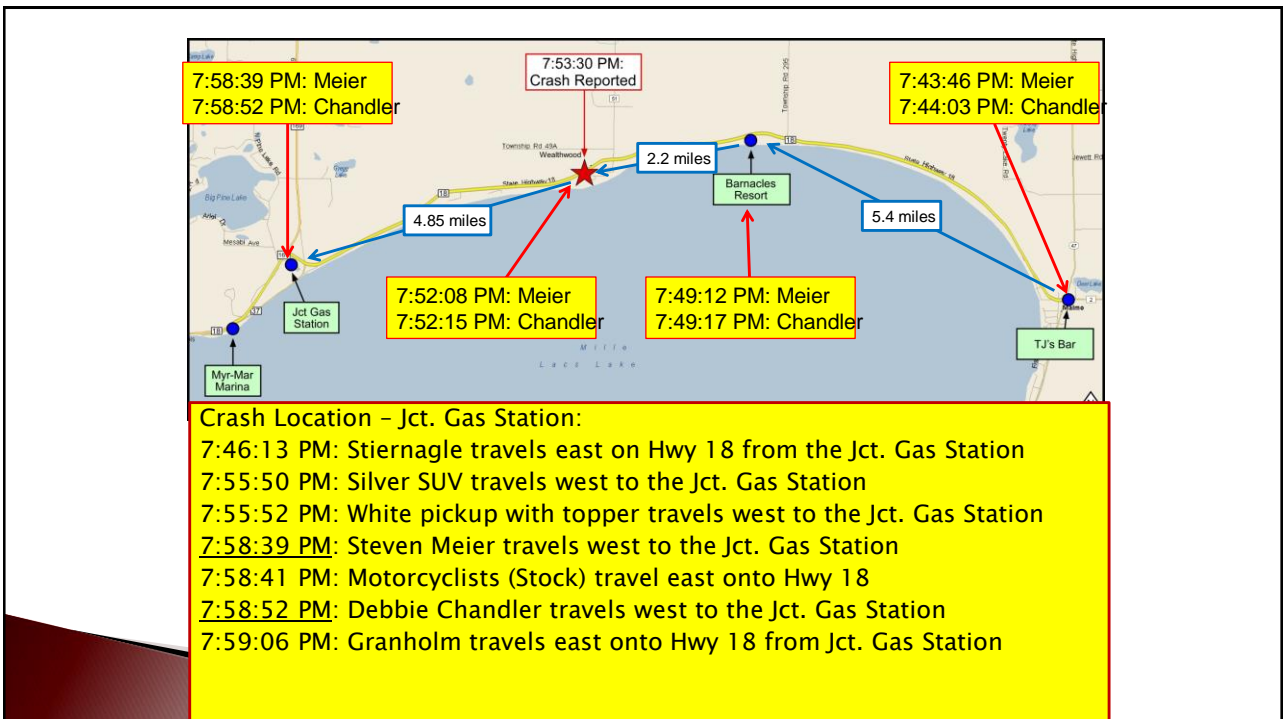
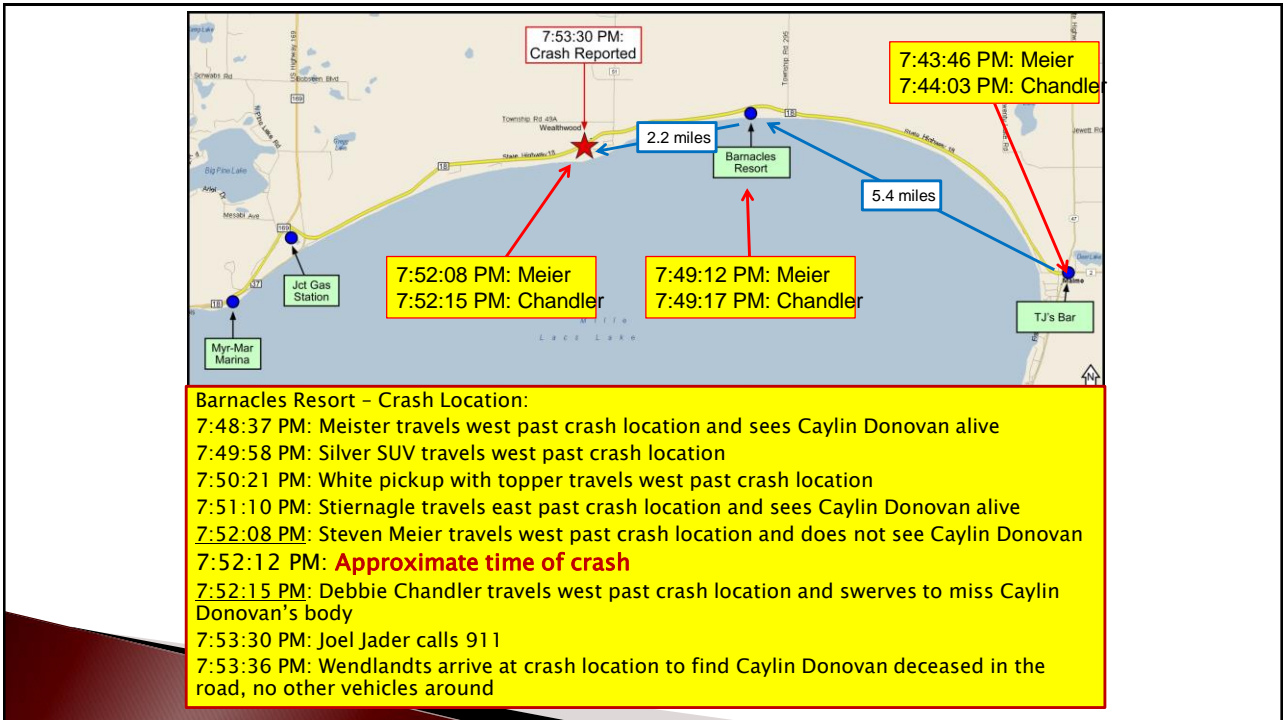
7:47:47 PM: A white pickup with a topper travels westbound past Barnacles Resort

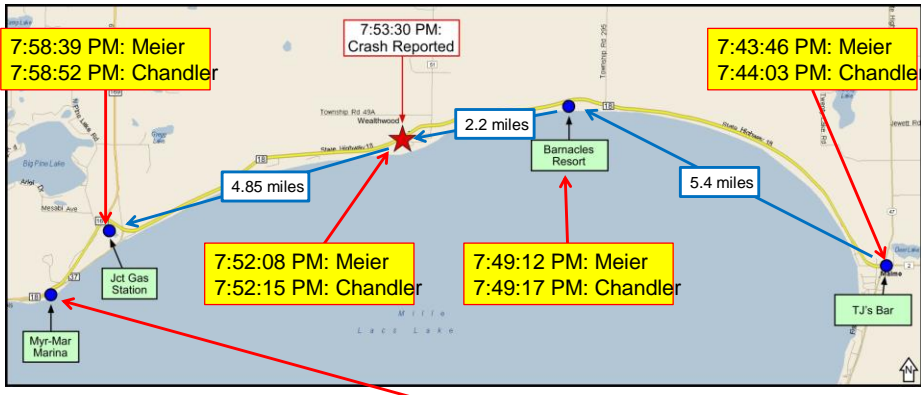
7:49:12 PM: Steven Meier travels westbound past Barnacles Resort

7:49:17 PM: Debbie Chandler travels westbound past Barnacles Resort

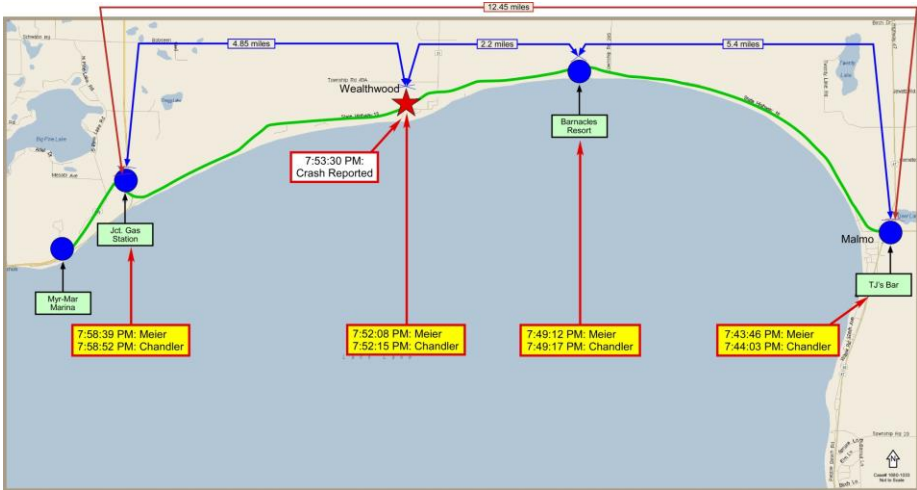
7:50:58 PM: Wendlandts travel westbound past Barnacles Resort

7:53:21 PM: Stiernagle travels eastbound and then north at Barnacles Resort





Myr-Mar Resort:
Steve Meier and Debbie Chandler spent the weekend at Myr-Mar Resort after the fatal hit and run crash



11/01/2017 Testing

- ▶ Defense- driver wouldn't know
- ▶ Similar vehicle, boat and trailer
- ▶ Video –
 - 2 Go Pro's on the boat/trailer
 - 2 Cameras roadside
 - Squad following
 - Aerial cancelled due to snow
- ▶ Assignments for those involved in the investigation



Similar damage

Test dummy final rest was near the actual final rest



Case resolution...

Driver pleads guilty in hit-and-run death of 10-year-old near Lake Mille Lacs

By Helmut Schmidt on Feb 1, 2018 at 8:16 p.m. Courtesy of the Brainerd Dispatch

▶ Prosecution

Meier pled guilty

- Felony
- Criminal Vehicular Homicide
 - Leaving the scene



Overall Reminders

- ▶ Keep an open mind
- ▶ Follow up on everything
- ▶ Utilize all possible resources as soon as possible

Key points

- ▶ Assign an investigator and separate specialists
- ▶ Latitude given to those investigating the case
- ▶ Call for assistance early on
 - Troopers, Deputies, Police Officers and BCA going above and beyond
- ▶ Contact local businesses (video, flyers, getting the word out)
- ▶ Facebook
- ▶ Press Release/Conference
- ▶ Very open communication with the press

Case Management

- ▶ Statements – record, standardize
- ▶ File organization – discovery, duplicates
- ▶ Faster access to important computer programs
- ▶ Online, real-time data sharing and notes
- ▶ 1 person has to oversee everything; gets overwhelming. Maybe 2?

Compiled Data

- ▶ My MDC
 - 139 GB of data
 - 137,388 files
- ▶ Network drive
 - 79 GB of data containing 69,412 files



Thank You!

- ▶ Aitkin County Sheriff's Office
- ▶ Brainerd Police Department
- ▶ Bureau of Criminal Apprehension – Agents, Crime Scene Team and Scientists
- ▶ Crow Wing County Sheriff's Office
- ▶ Dakota County Sheriff's Office
- ▶ MNDOT
- ▶ MN DNR Enforcement
- ▶ North Memorial Ambulance
- ▶ State Patrol – Brainerd, East Metro, Flight Wing

A cross stands on the north shoulder of Hwy. 18 in memory of Caylin Donovan, 10, Lake Park, who was killed in a hit-and-run June 10.

