



**Leah Carter, 19, lost her life after her car was swept into East Fork Creek near Gamaliel on December 31, 2018.**  
PHOTO/Allyson Dix, Jobe Publishing, Inc.



**Floodwaters of East Fork Creek rushed over the Earl and Larry Lyons Bridge, or better known as Lyons Bridge, on December 31, 2018. Leah Carter, 19, called 911 after her car stalled when she attempted to cross the bridge. Her body was recovered on January 5.**  
PHOTO/Allyson Dix, Jobe Publishing, Inc.

# CARTER

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the search and rescue efforts. A command center was set up at the Gamaliel Fire Hall where all members participating in the search would sign in and out over the next five days.

Those aiding in rescue battled more rain, swift waters, and wet, muddy terrain throughout the week.

Late Saturday morning, the direction to end search efforts came across emergency personnel radios. Soon after, unconfirmed reports that her body had been found began circulating.

At approximately 10:47 AM, civilian volunteers located Carter on the riverbank approximately five miles from Lyons Bridge, according to a press release from Kentucky State Police Public Affairs Officer Nick Hale.

Out-of-town volunteers were directed to report to the Monroe County High School on Saturday due to the influx of people and vehicles congesting the small town of Gamaliel, according to Monroe EMA David Rich. Previously, everyone was going to the fire hall.

Rich told the Barren County Progress that their search efforts were aided with groups from Barren, Warren, and Louisville Metro by 8:00 AM on Saturday. However, personnel from many other counties were also involved. Rich said volunteers would be bussed from MCHS to the fire hall for those who will be searching on foot and segregated into groups.

Nearly 2,000 people, including local, and some from as far as Ohio, Indiana, and Tennessee, and many search dogs were actively involved in the recovery efforts for Carter. Volunteers dedicated countless hours whether it be by searching, working behind the scenes, organizing search efforts, donating food, water,

and other items for those out searching.

Some searched on ATV and off-road vehicles driving alongside the banks and through fields, some on foot, while many used boats, kayaks, and even horses looking for Carter. On Saturday, one of the search dogs, Ki, was with his handler, Judith Weckman. Ki is a trained canine with the Kentucky Search Dog Association.

Saturday was the first day volunteers Kensie Smith and Emily Shirley from Monroe were able to aid in the recovery efforts. Smith, a professional photographer, said before Carter's body was found, "I stop at that bridge all the time to do pictures. I would have never thought twice about water being over that bridge."

"This is something you can't get off your mind. We've been thinking about her 24/7," Smith said.

Carter was a nursing student at Southcentral Kentucky Community & Technical College. A scroll through her Facebook reveals the outpouring of memories and love from the people that knew her.

"She had big dreams, she was the sweetest, most generous person I had ever met," one post by Mariel Bartley said.

The Barren County Search and Rescue Dive Team immediately responded to the call on the night Carter went missing.

"We got our apparatus from the [Barren] county barn and left out immediately after we got the page," Rescue diver Josh Kingrey told The Progress, "On the first night, we were out there until around 3:00 AM and back by 7:00 AM the next morning and continued until sundown."



**Barren County Search and Rescue Divers Captain Jeff Wyatt (left) and Josh Kingrey during the search after sundown for Leah Carter.**  
PHOTO/Josh Kingrey.

Barren's dive team assisted several days through the week as well as other search and rescue dive teams.

Kingrey said there are a lot of factors to consider when diving in water to attempt locating a drowned person, and in regards to the East Fork Creek and Barren River downstream from Lyons Bridge, their training has equipped them for such an area.

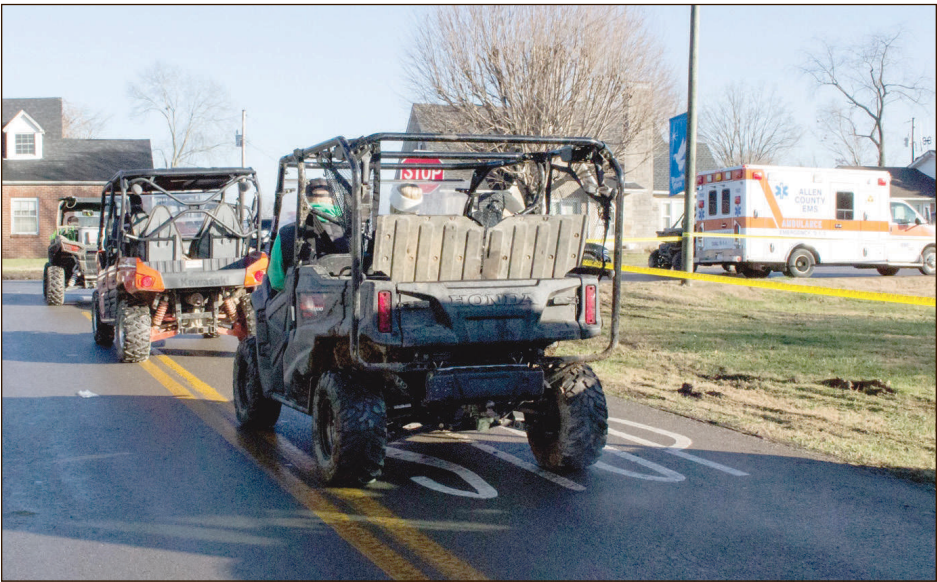
"It depends on the area, water conditions, and terrain on the search pattern we can employ in that area," Kingrey said. Visibility is a challenge in waters such as this; this type of water is what they refer to as 'blackwater' and "there are times the water is so dark and thick, we can't even read our air consumption gauges inches from our eyes without using a flashlight."

"This is a combination of swift water and dive rescue. This is a situation where both sets of skills come into play," he added, "We've got moving, swift water to contend with, and now trying to do a thorough search under water in the holes, which is where our dive training comes in."



**Barren County Rescue and Search Dive Team before heading into the water in the Witt Marsh area outside of Gamaliel.**  
PHOTO/Allyson Dix, Jobe Publishing, Inc.

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**Volunteers leaving Gamaliel Fire Hall in off-road vehicles on Saturday to aid in the recovery of missing 19-year-old Leah Carter.**  
PHOTO/Allyson Dix, Jobe Publishing, Inc.

The outpouring of love and support into the small community of Gamaliel during this tragedy has been an unprecedented example of how communities pull together to help bring closure to the family and friends of Carter, and help support those battling the terrain to find her.

"It's been a hard week for everybody," Monroe Sheriff Roger Dale "Frog" Ford said about the recovery efforts, "Everybody here, people that we don't even see behind the scenes, I can't express how proud I am of this community and the surrounding communities."

Thousands of South Central Kentucky friends and neighbors were praying for her safe return and saddened by the outcome of the tragedy.

Carter is the daughter of Laura and Gary McCarty, and the late Kelly Carter of Monroe County.



**The Earl and Larry Lyons Bridge just outside of Gamaliel where the vehicle driven by Leah Carter was swept into East Fork Creek by floodwaters following heavy rains on New Year's Eve.**  
PHOTO/Allyson Dix, Jobe Publishing, Inc.



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