

Finley Township tractor accident cuts short life of Scott County woman

Written by Marty Randall

Tuesday, 10 August 2010 00:00 - Last Updated Tuesday, 10 August 2010 14:06

Hundreds of people crowded the sidewalks and streets around the First Baptist Church of Scottsburg on Thursday evening, August 5, to pay their respects to the family of Rachelle "Shelley" Dawn Comer Akers, 35, Scottsburg.

Shelley, as she was known to family and friends, died of injuries she received in a bush-hogging accident that occurred in Finley Township on Monday afternoon, August 2. A tractor she was operating along the banks of Ox Creek near her parents' home overturned and pinned her beneath it. The accident occurred some time before 3 p.m. on Monday. According to information deputies Mark Shapinsky and Rodney Rudder gathered from the woman's relatives, Akers had taken the day off from her duties as office manager for the Purdue Extension Office in downtown Scottsburg to help her parents, Robert "Bob" and Ruth Comer.

Her mother said Akers had decided to bush-hog an overgrown section near the creek. When she did not return at the expected time, Mrs. Comer began looking for her daughter. She said she could not see her daughter, but when she stopped on the bridge over Ox Creek, she could hear Mrs. Akers calling for help. Deputy Shapinsky immediately called for Scott County EMS and Finley and Scottsburg volunteer fire departments. Mrs. Akers was found in a deep ravine next to Ox Creek about 200 feet south of Lake Road. The tractor's roll bar and fender were on top of the trapped woman's mid-section, but Shelley was alert and talking at that point, saying only that she could not feel her legs.

Rescuers learned from information Akers and family members gave them that she had been finished with her task and was traveling along the top of a hilly, uneven section next to the creek when one of the bush hog's wheels slipped off the edge and caused the equipment to roll into the ravine, trapping her.

Concluding that her injuries were life-threatening, officials called for the StatCare/PHI medical helicopter from Louisville. Scott County EMS and PHI staff as well as fire department First Responders were on hand when the heavy equipment was carefully lifted off the woman by a local wrecker service. Though all worked diligently to stabilize Akers for an airlift ride to a Louisville medical facility, she quickly faded from consciousness and died at the scene. Noted Deputy Rudder in his report of the incident, "PHI and EMS worked very hard for some time..." to keep the woman alive. In the end, however, her injuries were too extensive. Shelley was known for her love of her family and farm life, her dedication to work, her efficiency in performing her duties with the Extension Office and her willingness to help anyone who needed assistance. She had a light-up-your-life smile and soon made herself an indispensable part of the staff in the local Extension Office.

"She was a wonderful friend and colleague, a really hard worker who could see things that needed to be done and did them without asking. She was willing to take on anything; nothing was too hard for Shelley. We're going to miss her terribly," stated Extension Educator Jackie Benham. "She was the first face to greet us as we walked into the office in the morning, and she always had that big smile that reflected her wonderful personality. We loved to work together as a group because Shelley was involved. She was in 4-H for ten years as she was growing up, and she truly believed in the program because she knew it helped children and youth." In fact, said Benham, Akers and her family have always been a part of the 4-H program. "Shelley was one of the people who helped build the Scott County program into what it is today," she advised. Akers grew up on her parents' farm and was a graduate of Scottsburg High School and Indiana University Southeast. She and husband Kyle and their two little girls attended New Chapel

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United Methodist Church near Underwood. She was a member of the Scott County Community Foundation Board of Directors and served on its Scholarship Committee. She was also a valued volunteer worker for the American Cancer Society's Relay for Life.

Survivors include her husband, Kyle Thomas Akers; two daughters, Alexis Leiann Comer Akers and Addison Macy Comer Akers, both at home; her parents, Robert and Ruth Bartle Comer of Scottsburg; a brother, Russell "Russ" Wayne Comer and wife Bonnie of Scottsburg; her grandmother, Ann Bartle of Scottsburg; her father- and mother-in-law, Kevin and Carla Akers of Borden; her sisters-in-law, Kara Grooms and Alissa Akers; and her nephews and nieces, Evan Comer, Adam Comer, Wesley Grooms, Noelle Grooms and Lilly Lanham.

The funeral service was conducted at the church on Friday morning, August 6. The Rev. Danny Jackson and the Rev. James Hoppus officiated.

A private burial was conducted following the service.

Staff of the Stewart and Hougland Funeral Home of Scottsburg was in charge of arrangements.

Memorial gifts may be made to the 4-H Endowment Fund of the Scott County Community Foundation or to the Akers Educational Fund, which will benefit her children. That fund is established at Scott County State Bank. Those donations may be brought to the main bank in downtown Scottsburg or any of its branch banks or they can be mailed to Akers Educational Fund, c/o Scott County State Bank, ATT: Kat Julian, P.O. Box 158, Scottsburg, IN 47170.

On-line condolences may be expressed to the family by visiting www.stewartfuneralhome.net.