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3 rescued after fall through ice in Arlington

By Evan Allen and Matt Rocheleau | GLOBE CORRESPONDENTS JANUARY 23, 2012

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ARLINGTON - Moments after a 3-year old boy and his parents broke through thin ice and found themselves fighting to stay afloat more than 100 feet from the shore of Spy Pond, they were saved, one by one, last night by Arlington firefighters, who at times were unable to keep from falling through the ice themselves, officials said.

The 45-year-old father, 43-year-old mother, and their son, who officials said are Arlington residents but did not identify further, were sent to three different Boston hospitals where they were reported in stable condition last night.

Deputy Fire Chief Jim Bailey, who was among more than a dozen fire personnel who responded to the

scene, later said officials did not ask the family why they went out onto the ice.

The dramatic rescue began when a relative, who was standing on the shore of Spy Pond, called 911 at about 5:30 p.m. to alert officials that three people had fallen through the ice, according to town police and fire officials.

Police arrived within moments to the pond's edge near the end of Linwood Street, Bailey said.

The officers threw rescue disks, which are attached by 100 feet of rope, out into the pond.

But Bailey said the disks could not reach the family members, who were more than 100 feet from shore when the ice collapsed under their weight.

With the headlights of police cruisers illuminating the scene, firefighters deployed ice rescue equipment. Four donned dry suits as others deployed a rescue sled.

The ice at the edges of the pond was thick enough to stand on, said Bailey, but when several firefighters walked out on it together, some fell through and found themselves standing in 12 to 18 inches of water, Bailey said.

The family was in much deeper water - about six to eight feet deep - and neither of the adults could stand on their feet and keep their heads above water, he said.

The first firefighter who went out onto the ice wearing a dry suit began walking toward them, but he too fell through the ice. Bailey said the firefighter then swam out to the family, took the boy out of the mother's arms, and put him on the rescue sled.

A collective effort then ensued to redeploy the sled to rescue the mother, followed by the father, Bailey said.

The family was in the water for about five or 10 minutes before they were pulled to safety, Bailey said.

They were treated for injuries and hypothermia, he said.

Maeve Whitty, a Linwood Street resident, said that Spy Pond is a popular skating spot during the winter, but that it has not fully frozen over yet.

Even after the snowfall and cold temperatures this weekend, the pond wasn't iced over, Whitty said. She

said she didn't know why someone would try to walk on it.

"I saw a lot of open water" last night, she said. "I was surprised that someone attempted it."

In a statement, Arlington Police Chief Frederick Ryan urged the public to be wary of walking on ponds, rivers, and streams in the Greater Boston area, given the generally warm winter.

Bailey said the child was taken to Children's Hospital Boston. The mother was taken to Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center and the father to Massachusetts General Hospital, he said.

A police official said the boy was expected to be hospitalized overnight for observation, and the parents were expected to be treated and released.

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