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Serrano player killed in crash **Former Miss Victorville was thrown from vehicle**

SCOTT VANHORNE/Staff
Writer

PINON HILLS — A 17-year-old Serrano High School girls basketball player and former Miss Victorville died Thursday afternoon after she was thrown from and pinned under a sport utility vehicle.



Daily Press staff photo by Scott Vanhorne
Officials wait for a tow truck to lift a sport utility off Sara Rojas, who died Thursday in Pinon Hills when she was ejected from the vehicle.

San Bernardino County firefighters used prying tools and wooden blocks to try and move Sara Elizabeth Rojas from under the overturned Chevrolet Blazer, but after 30 minutes of trying, the emergency crews waved off a helicopter they had called to rush the girl to the hospital and summoned the coroner instead.

"It was just too late," California Highway Patrol Officer Craig Williams said.

About 1:17 p.m., Rojas was driving north on Ponderosa Road with two other 17-year-old girls when she accidentally hit the gas instead of the brakes, the officer said.

The Adelanto teen, who was not wearing a seat belt, lost control of the vehicle on the rocky dirt road and it rolled, ejecting and pinning her underneath.

"If she would have had her seat belt on, she would have been fine," Williams said.

The teen in the front seat was wearing her seat belt. She suffered only minor injuries. The girl in the back seat was not wearing her seat belt, but she too suffered minor injuries. The girls' names were not released. Neither required medical attention.

When firefighters arrived, Rojas was not breathing and had no pulse, San Bernardino County Fire Department Battalion Chief Tim Wessel said.

"We tried the best we could to do a quick extrication and get her out of there," he said.

The teen's mother knelt beside a chain-link fence and wept after firefighters pulled the girl's lifeless body from underneath the vehicle.

Meanwhile, members of the Serrano High School girls basketball team were about to head to a pre-season tournament in Hemet and were waiting for Rojas to arrive. When news of Rojas' death came, coaches canceled the trip.

According to Gary Weiberg, Serrano High's athletic director, a counseling crisis team was dispatched to the school late Thursday to help members of the girls basketball team cope with the loss of their teammate.

Weiberg said Rojas was a student trainer for the football team and was well-liked.

"I know the football team was really close to her," Weiberg said. "She was really well-liked on campus. Nobody ever really saw her in a bad mood."

Ray Maholchic, the football coach, agreed that she was friendly with everybody on campus.

"She was kind of a free spirit, happy-go-lucky kind of kid," Maholchic said.

Rojas also attended Maholchic's first period weight training class. The coach always joked with her about being late.

"I made her promise if she went to college she'd take afternoon classes," he said.

Once she made it to class, she worked hard to get in shape, Maholchic said.

"She liked to show off her muscles or her guns, she called them," Maholchic said.

Jean Lesch, who organizes the Miss Victorville pageant, said she remembered Rojas as a nice and outgoing girl.

"She was always willing to help," she said.