Naples expert talks about paddleboard safety

Chad Gillis
Fort Myers News-Press & Naples Daily News
USA TODAY NETWORK – FLORIDA

A 48-year-old standup paddleboarder from the Jupiter area is still missing after his board was found by powerboaters about 10 miles off the East Coast of Florida.

Matt Pawlowski was last seen about 4 miles off the coast, and he was paddling east, according to reports, on the morning of Sept. 14, and the reality of the situation has gotten more grim as Pawlowski had still not been found as of the afternoon of Sept. 17.

Standup paddleboards are immensely popular, especially on Florida's warm waters.

Most paddlers sit on the boards and float around on calm days, using the boards for floats as much as transportation.

The boards are really gigantic, thick surfboards. They have at least one fin in the rear, and that helps steer the board in wind and waves.

Paddlers stand on the boards and use superlong canoe paddles to propel themselves across the water.

It's a lot of fun and great exercise, but paddleboarding can become dangerous quickly if the weather changes or when paddlers go into conditions they're not prepared to endure.

The search for Pawlowski has involved air and sea crews as well as multiple agencies beyond the Coast Guard, including the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and Jupiter police.

The Coast Guard said Pawlowski rode a 14-foot lime-green-and-yellow paddleboard. A boater spotted the recovered one floating in the ocean about 10 miles offshore near Jupiter Island, the U.S. Coast Guard confirmed.

"Some of it is the craft and some of it is the level of the (paddler's) experience," said Jay Rose, owner of Paddlesports of Naples. "The board he was on was a relatively nice touring or racing style board."

Rose said stand paddlers here are often relatively new to the sport, or they don't fully appreciate or respect the oceanic conditions that can turn a leisurely day into a nightmare.

Rose said paddleboard accidents that end up with serious injuries are almost 100% due to the paddler not wearing a quality flotation device, or lifejacket.

Florida laws require all stand up paddleboards to have at least one Coast Guard approved PFD per person.

Rose suggests wearing the devices, and he makes all his clients wear a lifejacket and use a leash.

A surfing leash is a 6-to-8-foot length of hose, with one end tide to the rear of the board. The other end is strapped to the paddlers leg with a large section of Velcro.



Matt Pawlowski, 48, was reported missing on Monday, Sept. 14, after he failed to return from a paddleboarding excursion. Authorities say he was last seen about four miles off the coast of Jupiter. PROVIDED BY U.S. COAST GUARD

Most paddleboard accidents stem from a lack of protective gear, including a PFD and a leash.

"No matter what your experience level is, in basically 100% of the situations is a lack of a PFD, and 98% of times it's people without a leash. Rarely people are found connected to their board."

One thing about standup paddleboarding is the safety the board can provide. While short surfboards provide just enough floatation for the riders to catch a wave, standup paddleboards are designed to float a large paddler on flat water.

"For solo stuff, the board is going to be the most important part, and it will keep you afloat," Rose said.

Knowing the weather forecast and tides is a good place to start planning a paddle outing.

Rose pointed out that localized weather can change quickly, and that winds can shift directions quickly.

He suggested paddlers always carry a basic communications kit that could include things like a cell phone (not ideal in a marine situation), a VH marine radio, a satellite locator beacon or an SOS satellite device capable of quickly contacting the U.S. Coast Guard.

So, if you're going to safely standup paddleboard here, wear a PFD, a leash and carry a communications kit.

It's also a good practice to tell someone about your paddling plans, including when you expected to leave and roughly when you expected to return.

Julius Whigham II contributed to this report and covers northern Palm Beach County and public safety for The Palm Beach Post. You can reach him at jwhigham@pbpost.com and follow him on X, the platform formerly known as Twitter, at @JuliusWhigham.

Chad Gillis is an environment reporter and can be reached by email at cgillis@news-press.com.

Tour a research vessel, study sharks at Florida Climate Week event

Michèle Kelley
Palm Beach Post
USA TODAY NETWORK

Florida Climate Week returns Oct. 5-11 to unite residents in addressing the state's most pressing climate challenges and promoting sustainable solutions.

Floridians can participate in a variety of free, virtual and in-person events hosted by local nonprofits, businesses and educational institutions. One such event will take place in Palm Beach County, where the ANGARI Foundation will host an interactive experience at the Safe Harbor North Palm Beach Marina.

Hands-on science for all ages

On Oct. 8, from 4 to 7:30 p.m., attendees can meet the ANGARI team and explore the foundation's 65-foot research vessel, R/V ANGARI. The vessel is used for marine research on sharks, sea turtles, coral reefs and sargassum. Visitors will have the opportunity to learn how to measure a shark, study coral reefs and operate a research vessel. After the tour, guests can decorate biodegradable Lagoon Drift cards and learn about local waterways. The event will also feature live music and a food truck.

For more information on ANGARI Foundation's Florida Climate Week event, visit angari.org.

Raising awareness and driving solutions

Organized by VoLo Foundation, Florida Climate Week aims to raise awareness, share knowledge and drive practical solutions for a sustainable and resilient future. The program emphasizes the importance of collective action and community engagement in combating climate change.

"Florida Climate Week is an initiative to raise awareness, share knowledge and drive practical solutions for a sustainable and resilient future for Florida," according to the announcement. "The weeklong program underscores the importance of collective action and community engagement in combating climate change."

VoLo Foundation is a private nonprofit organization with a mission to accelerate change and global impact by supporting science-based climate solutions, enhancing education and improving health.

ANGARI Foundation, based in West

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Estero resident Joel Dobson Halberstadt is the nephew of Whataburger founder Harmon Dobson. ROBYN GEORGE/FORT MYERS NEWS-PRESS & NAPLES DAILY NEWS

This Estero resident has Whataburger in his veins

Robyn George
Fort Myers News-Press & Naples Daily News
USA TODAY NETWORK – FLORIDA

Whataburger celebrated the grand opening of its first Southwest Florida location on Sept. 10.

For one in attendance, it was a homecoming of sorts.

Most people know Harmon Dobson as Whataburger's founder.

But to Estero resident Joel Dobson Halberstadt, he was Uncle Harmon.

"He was my mother's brother," said Joel, who helped cut the ribbon at Whataburger's new Fort Myers location. "He was very gregarious, very friendly. He was so self-assured."

Whataburger, Joel said, is "one of America's greatest success stories."

Harmon, one of four children including Joel's mother, opened his first Whataburger in Corpus Christi, Texas, in 1950.

"There was nothing he couldn't do," Joel said. "He said success was based on four things."

Those were safety, for employees and customers; courtesy, "he wanted to make customers feel like they were the only ones in the store"; quality and consistency.

Whataburger thrived.

"Harmon (who was a pilot) used to go up in his plane and drop leaflets over new towns Whataburger was coming to," Joel said. "He would fly city to city in Texas, analyzing roads and what areas were growing. He looked for where to go next."

Joel's father opened Whataburger No. 24 in 1961 and No. 30 in 1963 in Odessa, Texas.

"Burgers were 40 cents," Joel said. "On a good day, we would sell 400 burgers. Now they sell 3,000 or 4,000. We had nine on a staff. Fort Myers has about 115. Ours was a prehistoric version of what it is today."

In high school, Joel worked at Whataburger in Odessa — home to the Permian High School Panthers, the team behind "Friday Night Lights."

"Whataburger was one of the places the players would go," Joel said. "That's how the triple-triple started. They wanted more protein."

Tragedy struck in 1967 when the plane Harmon was flying crashed. Joel was 21.

"I remember it like it was yesterday," he said. "I never forgot what he taught me. It carried me well throughout my life."

NATION & WORLD BRIEFS

German general elected to head top NATO military body

BRUSSELS – Gen. Carsten Breuer, Germany's chief of defense, was chosen on Sept. 19 as the next head of NATO's military committee, the alliance's top military authority and a key advisory body for its political leaders.

Military chiefs from the 32-nation alliance elected Breuer at a meeting in Copenhagen, current chair Italian Adm. Giuseppe Cavo Dragone said on X. Breuer will take up the role next summer, succeeding Dragone.

"Your operational judgement, your deep familiarity with this Alliance and your leadership of the German Armed Forces will serve NATO well," Dragone wrote, congratulating Breuer.

The committee is NATO's senior military authority and its chair serves as the main military adviser to its political chief, Secretary General Mark Rutte.

Breuer will assume the post at a time of upheaval in the alliance. President Donald Trump has demanded that European countries take primary responsibility for the continent's defense after decades of American leadership.

Trump signs sweeping Russia sanctions bill into law

WASHINGTON – President Donald Trump on Sept. 18 signed the sweeping Russia sanctions bill into law, the White House said in a statement, paving the way for increased economic pressure on Russia over its invasion of Ukraine.

The legislation targets Russia's energy and defense industries, as well as its "shadow fleet" of tankers that evade existing sanctions, in order to deprive Moscow of funds used to pay for its war with Ukraine.

Climate Week

Continued from Page 3C

Palm Beach, is dedicated to creating a global community interested in marine and environmental sciences. The foundation supports research initiatives that foster trust and dialogue between scientists and the public. ANGARI uses technology, film and other media to raise awareness and strengthen science education. Many of its initiatives involve the R/V ANGARI, which serves as a research and education platform.

For a full list of Florida Climate Week events, visit floridaclimateweek.org.

About VoLo Foundation

VoLo Foundation is a private nonprofit foundation with a mission to accelerate change and global impact by supporting science-based climate solutions, enhancing education and improving health.

About ANGARI Foundation

ANGARI Foundation is a private operating foundation established in 2016 and headquartered in West Palm Beach. The foundation is dedicated to creating a global community that is interested, knowledgeable and invested in marine and environmental sciences by directly supporting research initiatives that foster a greater trust and dialogue between scientists and the public.



Florida Climate Week returns Oct. 5-11 with events like a research vessel tour to promote sustainable solutions. PROVIDED BY CHELSEA CASAGRANDE

This story was created by web producer Michele Kelley (mkelley@pbpost.com) with the assistance of Artificial Intelligence (AI). Journalists were involved in every step of the information gathering, review, editing and publishing process. Learn more.

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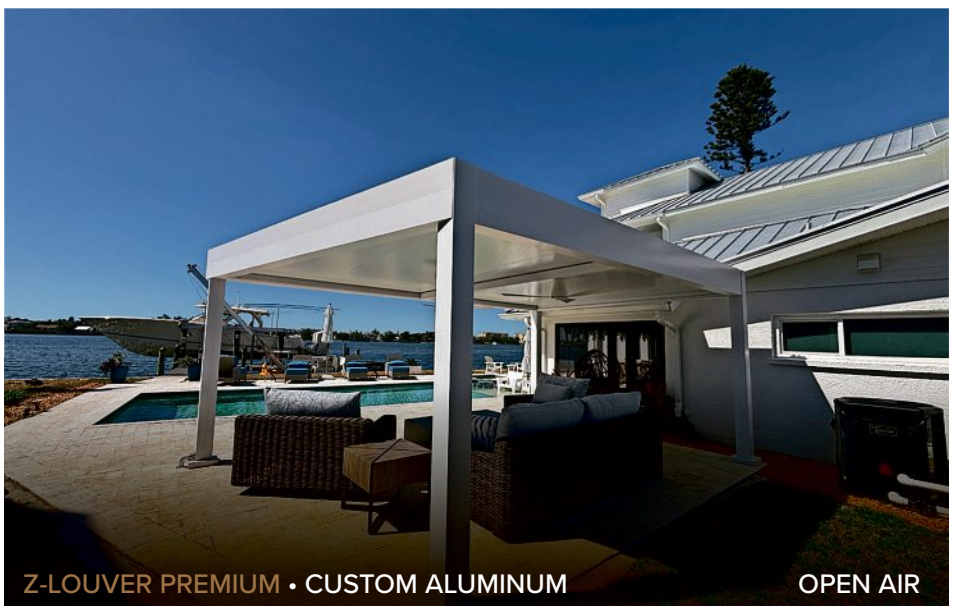
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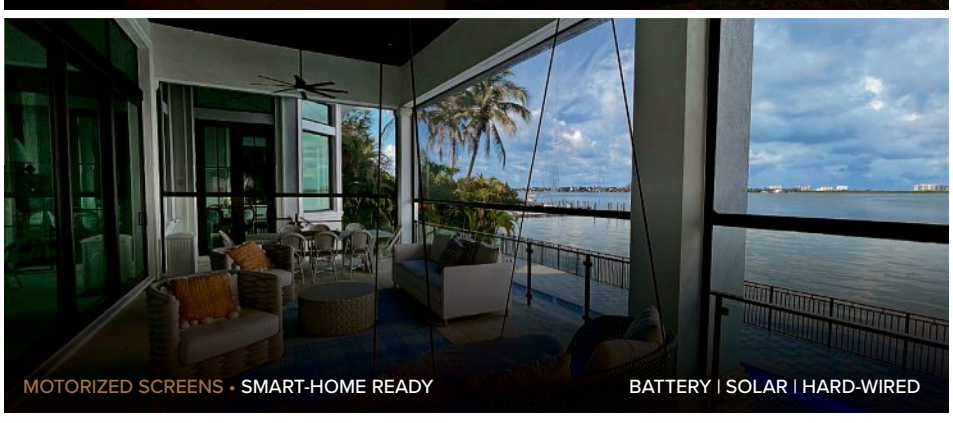
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