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Shark-attack site draws curious, concerned

"We are advising people of the situation and that they are entering at their own risk."

SGT. HANS FERNAN,
lifeguard

By Steve Schmidt
STAFF WRITER

SOLANA BEACH — Clutching cameras, binoculars and fresh flowers, they stood on warm sand and stared into the sea, offering prayers for a man most had never met.

"I said a prayer, and I'm not normally a prayer person," Dave Allen of Leucadia said.

The curious and the concerned streamed to this tight-knit town yesterday, drawn to the site of the first fatal shark attack in San Diego County waters in nearly 50 years.

At Fletcher Cove Beach Park on a bright spring day, some laid flowers at a makeshift memorial for David Martin, 66, who died on a triathlon training swim near his home Friday morning.

Warnings to stay out of the water through tomorrow morning have been posted from the north end of Torrey Pines State Beach to South Carlsbad State Beach.

Along other stretches of sand, including San Diego's Mission Beach, people rode bodyboards and bobbed in the water. All

SEE **Shark attack, A15**



Many of the warning signs lifeguards posted quickly disappeared yesterday. *John Gibbins / Union-Tribune*

► SHARK ATTACK

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Several visitors laid bouquets on a patch of grass

beach-goers were aware of Martin's death, and some said they were reluctant to venture into the ocean.

"I went in, but not very far and not for very long," said Lisa Orr of La Mesa.

Lifeguards in Oceanside, Carlsbad and San Diego reported normal weekend crowds. In San Diego, the afternoon high at Lindbergh Field was 84 degrees. Solana Beach and Del Mar both reached 76 degrees.

Off Fletcher Cove, few dared to dip into the 60-degree water. One lone fisherman on the beach, angling for bass, waded in no deeper than his thighs.

Many San Diego County residents relish their close ties to the sea, but most along the North Coast said they want to keep a respectful distance — for now.

"I think everybody is in shock because something like this hasn't happened since 1959," said Allen, a native San Diegan.

Others found the random nature of it sobering.

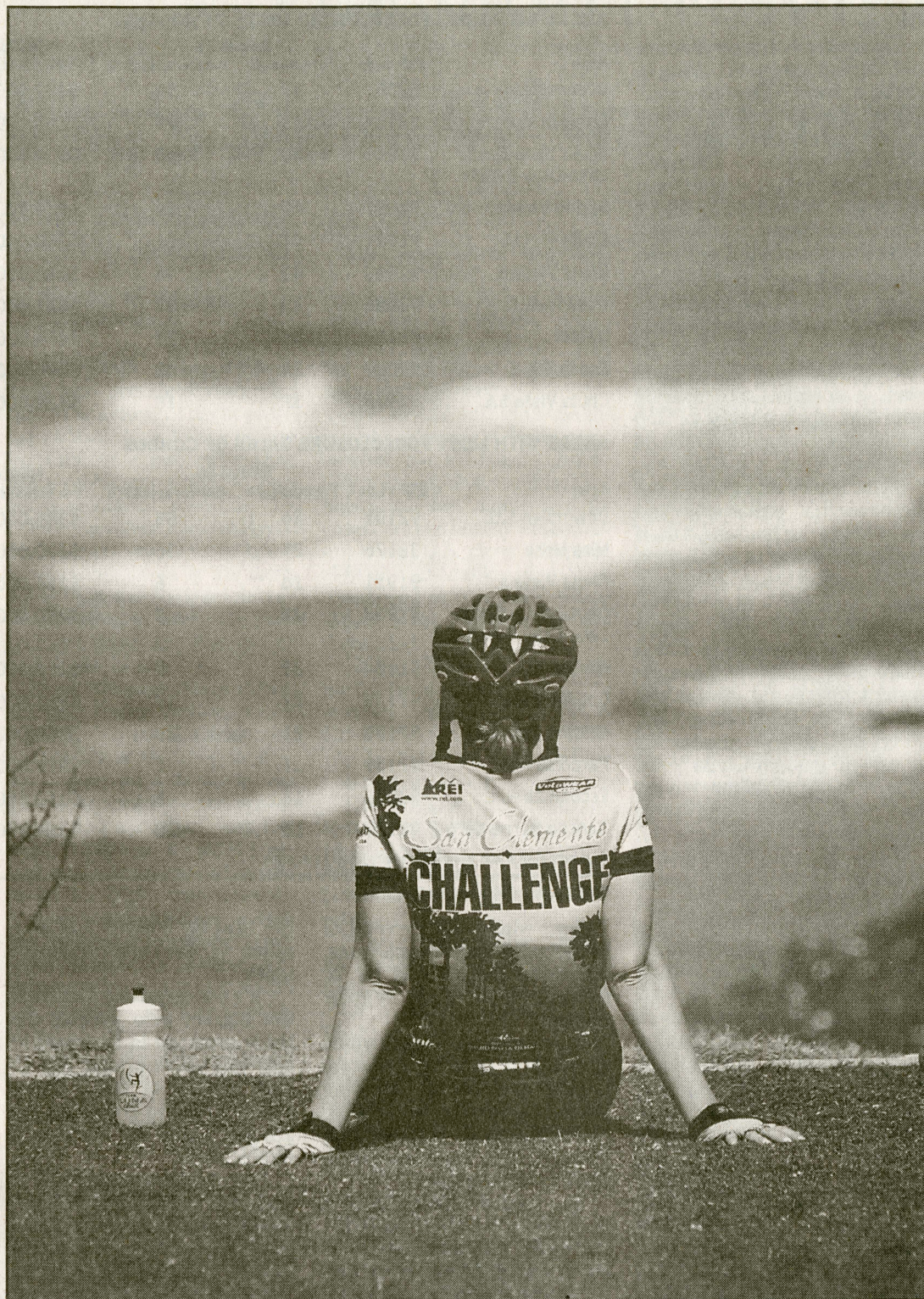
According to reports, Martin was swimming about 150 yards offshore, in water 20 to 30 feet deep, when the attack occurred. Witnesses said the shark thrust Martin up out the water as it bit into his legs.

The county Medical Examiner's Office conducted an autopsy yesterday and said Martin died of blood loss. A shark expert present during the autopsy, Ralph Collier with the Los Angeles-based Shark Research Committee, said the wounds indicated the shark was a 15- to 16-foot-long great white.

"It's such a rare occurrence. I think that's why it seems so surreal," said Deb Scherler of Solana Beach. "It's the kind of stuff that happens in movies."

The Martin family was in seclusion yesterday as officials from the city of Solana Beach, a community of about 13,000, responded to media inquiries from around the globe.

City officials said the family planned to hold a news conference this afternoon.



Solana Beach triathlete Holly Scheideler stopped at Fletcher Cove Beach Park yesterday to reflect on a fatal shark attack on a fellow triathlete a day earlier. John Gibbins / Union-Tribune

New Yorker Vadim Sherman and his family, on vacation in San Diego, went out of their way yesterday to visit Fletcher Cove. "We came to see the spot and pay our respects," he said.

Sherman said one of his sons saw media coverage of the Solana Beach attack at his home in the Dominican Republic. He called to urge his father to stay off all San Diego beaches.

"The whole thing's wild; it's

wild," Sherman said.

The warnings didn't stop some beach-goers from going in. Close to 1,000 people were enjoying beaches in Encinitas and Solana Beach, lifeguard Sgt. Hans Fernan said. Small waves made the ocean less of a magnet for surfers.

"There are handfuls of people going in and out of the water. There's a few surfers," Fernan said. "We are advising

people of the situation and that they are entering at their own risk."

As Coast Guard and sheriff's helicopters made routine flybys throughout the day, their crews were told to keep an eye out for sharks or other unusual activity. No aircraft has been assigned to search specifically for sharks.

The last fatal shark attack in California, according to data

"I went in (to the water), but not very far and not for very long."

LISA ORR

of La Mesa

from the state Department of Fish and Game, took place Aug. 15, 2004, off Mendocino County. The victim was a man diving for shellfish with a friend.

Overall, shark attacks are extremely rare. There were 71 reported worldwide last year, up from 63 in 2006.

On Friday, North Coast lifeguards posted hundreds of signs warning people to stay clear of the sea. The placards reported what happened and included a drawing of a great white.

Many of the signs were gone by yesterday morning, apparently stolen.

Allen and others called the thefts perverse, worried that some might try to exploit the tragedy.

"Watch," Allen said. "Someone is going to put those signs up on eBay."

While many went to Fletcher Cove to mourn, others tried not to dwell on the death. Dozens of families spent the morning taking part in a beach cleanup program.

Some stopped to gaze into the water, shuddering at the thought of what happened to Martin, a Solana Beach resident, retired veterinarian and father of four.

Several morning visitors laid bouquets of roses, lilies and other flowers on a patch of grass overlooking the cove. More bouquets were added in the afternoon.

Some of the flowers included handwritten notes to Martin that recalled his contributions to the community.

"Dear Dr. Martin: You were the kindest, most compassionate man I have ever known," read one note. "Thank you for taking such incredible care of our animals for more than 20 years."

Staff writers Kristina Davis and Tanya Sierra and The Associated Press contributed to this report.

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