

# Plane search ends tragically

## Debris, body found in Sussex

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**HARDYSTON** — The wreckage of a small airplane and the remains of its pilot, missing since Sunday, were found on Thursday.

Debris from the plane and the body of Roland Melanson, of Wantage, were found about 5 p.m., said Jim Peters, a spokesman for the Federal Aviation Administration.

Volunteers from local and state agencies had searched the forest for five days before finding the 58-year-old Melanson and his yellow

plane. The site where the plane came down, off Silver Lake Road, is near the Hamburg Mountain Wildlife Management Area in northeastern Sussex County.

The discovery of the plane and body were also announced at an 8 p.m. news conference held by Hardyston officials. Mayor Kenneth P. Kievit said the family has been notified and that he had expressed his condolences.

"It's been a very sad week," he said.

Police Capt. Alan Henderson, the spokesman for the search operation, declined to provide any  
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details about where searchers found the airplane. Henderson said Melanson's body was taken to the Sussex County medical examiner's office for an autopsy.

He also said the FAA and National Transportation Safety Board would now take over the investigation.

Melanson, who worked at Stryker Orthopaedics in Mahwah, was an experienced pilot. His single-engine Cessna 182P had disappeared off radar screens about 7:30 a.m. on Sunday, shortly after

taking off from Sussex Airport in Wantage on a flight to Connecticut, the FAA said.

Teams of emergency responders from New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania had scanned the woods in Hardyston and Franklin by airplane, foot and all-terrain vehicle since midday Sunday. But the dense forest canopy and rocky, steep terrain stymied the search operation.

Among the initial searchers were the Storms family, who live in a rural neighborhood near Silver Lake.

Nan Storms, 49, said she was in her kitchen Sunday morning when she heard a plane flying very low, then the engine cut out, fol-

lowed by a loud sound like trees were falling in the distance. She looked out the window and saw nothing. Later that morning, she heard from her mother of a report that a plane had crashed. Storms said she called the Hardyston Fire Department, and her son and husband jumped on ATVs and began searching the nearby woods.

As the search progressed, authorities tightly regulated the public and media, discouraging them from joining the search. For observers, the first sign that the plane was found was when a white medical examiner's van pulled up at the Hardyston fire house about 6:15 p.m. on Thursday.

The van drove on Route 23 toward Silver Lake Road, which police blocked off. But even then, officials in charge of the search operation declined to provide any information.

Earlier Thursday afternoon, Melanson family members had visited the search area, and appeared to be in good spirits.

"They came down to see how everything was going, to see if they

could bring supplies to the rescue workers," said Police Capt. Henderson.

The search began in the Oak Ridge section of West Milford, said Henderson. Officials then focused on Hamburg Mountain, most of which is covered by dense forest.

Leslie Melanson told a reporter on Thursday that she was hopeful her husband would be found alive. The Melansons have two children; Leslie Melanson asked they not be identified.

"I am so impressed with the search and rescue people," said Leslie Melanson. "The whole emergency management team has been absolutely wonderful. They are out there from first light until after dark, giving their full attention, all of their energy, to saving my husband."

"I want to thank [the searchers] sincerely, along with all of my friends and neighbors who have been here to support us, our church, and Stryker Corp., my husband's company. Really, I want to thank everyone for everything that they are doing."