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PANAMA CITY

Spring Break death: 'He was a great kid'

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PANAMA CITY BEACH — The last online message a 19-year-old Georgia farm boy had for his friends indicated he hoped to enjoy a night of partying; instead, the night ended with the young vacationer's death.

A lower-level guest at Holiday Terrace motel saw Brandon Ward Kohler fall from his fifth-floor balcony just before 8:30 p.m. Wednesday night. By the time police and paramedics reached the cement parking lot where his body lay, Kohler was dead.

His was the first fatal balcony fall during this year's Spring Break — vacationers survived a three-story fall and a two-story fall earlier this month — and the only balcony fall from the beachfront Holiday Terrace.

Still, general manager Debbie Woodham said she has spent most of her Spring Break shifts outside, looking up.

"You wouldn't believe how many legs are hanging out balconies, trying to climb up to another balcony," Woodham said. "I go room to room when we're full and hand them a letter that says you're not to hang over the balconies; you're not to throw anything over the balconies.

"Our balconies are very secure but we just know ... we really warn them on the balconies."

Kohler, a Winder, Ga., native and 2010 graduate of Winder-Barrow High School, checked into the motel Tuesday afternoon and planned to check out Thursday morning, Woodham said.

"He and his friend were the most polite, sweetest guys," she added. "It was 'Yes, ma'am,' 'No, ma'am' — extremely polite. They gave the impression of being very good kids."

Kohler played football for the Winder-Barrow Bulldogs and was active in FFA (formerly known as the Future Farmers of America). His high school principal told his hometown newspaper that Kohler was a determined and dynamic young man.

"The thing I remember about Brandon was that he was a great kid — always respectful," Principal Al Darby told the Barrow County News. "He had fought some adversity with personal issues, but he overcame those with determination. He was able to graduate and had a bright future."

Police said they think Kohler was alone in his motel room when he fell, and it does not appear to be foul play, Panama City Beach Police Maj. David Humphreys said. It also appears the balcony railing was in good condition and did not contribute to the fall, he added.

He said Kohler's death seems to have been "a tragic accident."

Video surveillance from the hotel and interviews with friends indicate "alcohol was possibly involved" in his fall, Humphreys added. Friends were "partying" in the room with the young man shortly before they left him alone at the motel, he said.

Kohler maintained two MySpace accounts and a Facebook profile online. The last login to MySpace was the day of his death; his final status update read: "Tonight.....WE'RE GETTING (messed) UP."

He talked about deer hunting and mud bogging on his MySpace page, and he described himself:

"Well wut do i say? im a pretty cool kid i suppose. i like doin the usual hangin with my friends and having a good time. ... dont really know what else to say but lifes great and im enjoyin the hell out of it," he wrote.

A young woman identified as his girlfriend made the most recent post on his Facebook wall.

"Losing you hurts so much. This isnt goodbye & i know you're watching over me. ... I love you baby & please help me through this," she wrote.

Police continue to review the video surveillance, and an autopsy is scheduled for 9 a.m. Friday, Humphreys said. He expects the results of the toxicology report in six to eight weeks.

An earlier update on this story:

PANAMA CITY BEACH — A 19-year-old Georgia spring breaker was the victim of a Wednesday night balcony fall, police said Thursday.

Brandon Ward Kohler, of Winder, Ga., died shortly before 8:30 p.m. after falling from a fifth-floor balcony at the Holiday Terrace motel on Front Beach Road, according to a Panama City Beach police news release. EMS pronounced him dead at the scene, police said.

The investigation continues pending an autopsy, which is scheduled for Friday at 9 a.m.

Check back throughout the day for more information on this developing story

Read earlier coverage: [Spring breaker killed in fifth-floor balcony fall »](#)