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Corinne Schillings, a Homewood native, and her soon-to-be fiance, Andrew Roccella, graduated from Purdue University.

Love story ends in frigid waters off Baltimore

Couple missing and feared dead

By Rudolph Bush
Tribune staff reporter

It was the weekend Andrew Roccella planned to ask Corinne Schillings to marry him.

They were going to spend time with both sets of parents, and Roccella hoped to take Schillings' father aside and ask for his daughter's hand.

Then, when the time was right, he would ask the Homewood native the question she talked about all the time at work, the question to which she would answer yes.

"This is a tragic love story," said Schillings' aunt, Gayle Krek. "What Corinne didn't know was he had just purchased a diamond ring."

Roccella and Schillings, both 26, remained missing along with Daniel Benstrem, 6, of Harrisonburg, Va., after the water taxi carrying them and 22 others overturned in a sudden storm that swept through Baltimore's inner harbor Saturday.

Search teams combed a 1,000-square-yard area of rough harbor water Monday hoping to find signs of the three, but the divers were called back in at dark.

Schillings' parents, Denny and Karen Schillings of Homewood, and Roccella's parents, Dr. Edward Roccella and his

wife Eileen of Vienna, Va., were among the 22 rescued by Navy reservists. A 60-year-old woman died later.

The parents believe the young couple died and are praying for the return of their remains, according to a statement they issued.

Roccella and Schillings met in Florence, Italy, in the summer of 1998 while studying abroad. Both attended Purdue University, where she was a language major, focusing on Italian and Spanish. He studied professional writing and was a member of the lacrosse team. They graduated in 1999 and soon moved to Washington D.C.

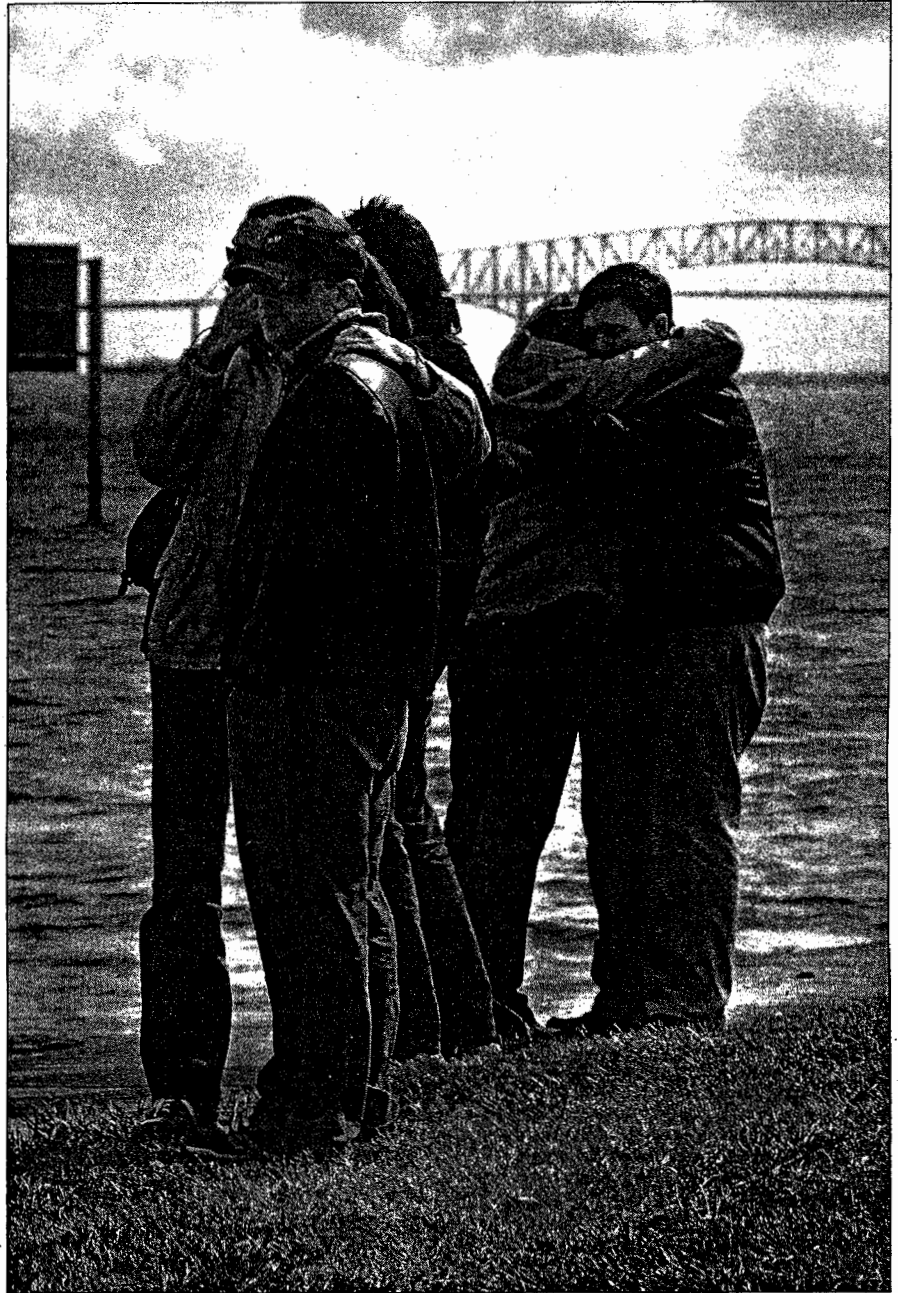
Schillings' roots were in Homewood, where her parents were educators in local schools and active in the community.

As a child, Schillings was in Girl Scouts, earning the Silver Award in 1991, before going on to Homewood-Flossmoor High School, the family statement said. Her father was a teacher at Homewood-Flossmoor for 30 years, and she was an excellent student, school spokesman David Thieman said.

"The entire Homewood-Flossmoor community is really devastated," Thieman said.

Her mother taught for many years at Willow Elementary School and still is president of Girl Scouts of Southern Cook County, said Girl Scouts spokeswoman Carol Kocan.

Corinne Schillings re-



Baltimore Sun photo by Amy Davis

Friends of the missing couple console each other on the shore Monday as recovery teams searched the frigid waters of Baltimore's inner harbor.

mained active with Girl Scouts as well, and the family plans to establish a scholarship in her name to be granted to a Silver Award recipient.

According to those who knew her, Corinne Schillings was much the same way. From her professor at Purdue to her boss at the Cato Institute in Washington, she was described as an intelligent and attractive woman who was eager for her future.

"I've worked in a lot of places with a lot of people, and she was one of the nicest people I have ever worked with," said

Virginia Anderson, director of Web services at Cato, where Schillings was the Webmaster.

Ben Lawton, her Italian professor at Purdue, recalled her as intellectually curious and adept at languages.

"I have seen hundreds, thousands of students during my career, and the fact that I remember her instantaneously says something about her," Lawton said.

Schillings recently enrolled in a master's program in international finance at George Mason University. She was drawn to work at the Cato In-

stitute because she was exploring libertarianism and hoped the think tank could be a place where she might contribute to a wider public policy debate, Anderson said.

She also talked of Roccella and her hope that they would soon be married.

"She would always talk about it," Anderson said. "She was waiting for him to pop the question."

They were deeply in love, family and friends said.

"They were both so young, it's just not fair," Anderson said.