

Daily News

Published: Saturday, June 5, 2010 1:44 AM CDT

Teens dive in to rescue man



From left: William Benkovich, Tom Jones, Jimmy Benkovich and Jim Benkovich gather after William and Jimmy rescued Jones from drowning. Grandpa Jim Benkovich couldn't be more proud of his two grandsons from Hononegah High School. Staff photo by Hillary Gavan

Weekend fun interrupted by emergency

By Hillary Gavan

hgavan@beloitdailynews.com

One man is spreading the message about life jackets after he was rescued from Horseshoe Lake by Hononegah High School students William and Jimmy Benkovich.

Tom Jones of River Falls, Wis., was enjoying a sunny day on May 29 in Minong, Wis., on his pontoon boat when it unexpectedly ran out of gas. Jones decided to swim to shore, which he said was about 200 yards away, to get his jet ski to pull in the boat.

Jones, an avid swimmer, said he didn't even bother to put on his life jacket. He started swimming to shore, but fell under the waters at about 100 yards. Jones doesn't remember tiring or feeling ill, he only remembers slipping under the water and hearing his wife call out for help.

"I just went down like a ton of bricks," Jones said.

Hearing her cries, William Benkovich, 15, and Jimmy Benkovich, 16, who were fishing along the shoreline, rushed to save Jones. Jimmy Benkovich said that he saw the man's head bobbing up and down. Jones said he really doesn't know what happened to him or why he couldn't swim any further. He was able to hear the boys, but he couldn't see and that his muscles wouldn't move. He's thankful that the two were nearby.

"Those two kids, they were willing to jump into action," Jones said. "My wife hollered out and they went running."

Jimmy said he and his brother each grabbed under Jones' arms. Because he was so limp, the boys were able to swim him in to the shore quickly. In another lucky twist of fate, a nurse in a pontoon boat pulled into shore to look Jones over. Although Jones' eyes were closed and he was hyperventilating, his family was able to get him to the hospital. Doctors told him he had water in his lungs and a low oxygen count.

Jimmy said he didn't think twice about hopping in the waters. He and his brother have been swimming all their lives. The

best part of their experience was having Tom Jones and his wife, Lisa, stop by on their jet ski the next day to thank them.

“It was nice to see him wearing a life preserver,” Jimmy said.

His grandfather, Jim Benkovich, a lifeguard, said Jimmy and William are in excellent physical condition participating in track, football and wrestling. As a lifeguard Jim said he’s always ready to go in after someone, but he was in the cabin basement at the time of the incident.

But by the time Jim got to the shoreline, however, he said his grandsons were almost back with Jones. Despite their success with Jones, Jim is urging his grandsons to take life saving classes in case they are ever needed for a rescue again.

Jones said the experience has taught him to always wear a life jacket, even if he’s a good swimmer. It’s a message he’s trying to spread to his sons and other kids. Jones said slipping under the water can happen to anybody at any time.

EDITORIAL: Life saved, Lesson learned

Published: Tuesday, June 8, 2010 11:49 AM CDT BELOIT Daily News
“Good swimmer” without life jacket rescued by brothers from Hononegah

TWO BROTHERS were in the right place, at the right time, and did the right thing. They saved a life. Their act of heroism sends an important message, especially at this time of the year.

That message is: If you’re boating, water-skiing or doing whatever on the water, wear a life jacket. Even if you think you’re a good swimmer. Even if your water craft is “safe.” Even if you’re just a short distance from shore.

Tom Jones, of River Falls, Wis., is a middle-aged guy who considers himself a good swimmer. When his pontoon boat ran out of gas up on Horseshoe Lake, he decided to swim the 200 yards to shore to get a jet ski to pull his boat to the dock. He didn’t bother to put on a life jacket; the swim to shore would be a piece of cake.

BUT JONES’ SWIM wasn’t a piece of cake. It could have been his Waterloo. For whatever reason, he found himself sinking “like a ton of bricks” beneath the water. His wife saw what was happening and screamed for help.

As luck would have it, brothers William and Jimmy Benkovich were fishing nearby and heard Mrs. Jones calling for help. They saw Jones struggling and jumped into the water and brought him to shore. A short stay in a hospital cleared Jones’ lungs of water, and he was back on the lake the next day — wearing his life jacket.

William and Jimmy Benkovich are Hononegah High School students who were up north visiting their grandfather, Jim Benkovich, at the time of the rescue. To say Grandpa, and other family members are proud of the two boys, is an understatement.

The lifesaving incident is something to celebrate and be thankful for. But almost as important are the messages to be gained: Always wear a life jacket while out on the water, and if you’re a swimmer, be sure to take water safety lessons, including how to rescue swimmers in trouble, and how to help them once they’re brought to shore.

Tom and Lisa Jones have told William and Jimmy how grateful they are. We offer them our hearty praise for their heroism