

Hero teens save man from Charlevoix's Round Lake

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CHARLEVOIX — When they saw a dinghy circling around in the middle of Charlevoix's Round Lake with no one in the driver's seat, they knew there was something wrong.

When Margeaux Leakas, 16, of Dayton, Ohio, and her friend Lacey Flanigan, 17, of St. Louis, Mo., decided to meet their friend and go for a ride on Lacey's jet-ski recently, they saw something that didn't look right.

"People were just standing on their docks, pointing to the water. All those people had bigger boats or yachts, so they couldn't really do anything," said Lacey. "I mean, by the time they would have gotten themselves untied and started up, it would have been too late. So, we just booked it over there."

What the people on the dock saw was a drowning man.

"We could see a man in a bright blue shirt from where we were, and he was just throwing his arms around everywhere," said Margeaux.

The man in distress, Robert Leitz, 62, of Sister Bay, Wis., was not wearing a life jacket.

"I figured it wasn't going to be a very long trip, and I could see my friend's boat from where I was," Leitz said. "I was going to visit a friend of mine on the other side of the lake, so I kind of had my guard down. All of a sudden, the boat jumped out from under me," he said.

Leitz, who claims to be a pretty good swimmer, and has been involved with boating for more than 30 years, said he just made a stupid mistake.

"My first instinct was to try to catch up to the dinghy because at the time it was just idling away from me," he said. "The water was so cold though and I was losing strength as I was trying to catch up to it."

Leitz said someone told him the water was 52 degrees when he fell in. Anything less than 70 degrees can induce hypothermia.

"I was in the water for about four or five minutes. If those girls hadn't gotten to me in time, I think I would have lost con-

sciousness," Leitz said.

Leitz's only hope was the two girls on the jet-ski who were still out of reach at that point.

As he was fighting to keep his head above water, the dinghy was coming back at him.

The propeller of the dinghy sliced his ear and a part of his shoulder, leaving him in need of approximately seven stitches in his ear.

When the girls got to the scene, they saw Leitz bleeding and flailing around in the water.

One of the girls threw him her life jacket but Leitz didn't respond to it. So, Margeaux decided to jump in the water and save him herself.

Lacey was not only steering the jet-ski, but she was tied to it as well, so this left Margeaux to saving the man's life.

The 135 pound Margeaux was somehow able to swim the 250 to 300 pound Leitz to safety by getting him to a nearby boat that was on its way.

After Margeaux got back on the jet-ski, the girls located the out-of-control dinghy. Lacey jumped on the small boat,

which had run into a moored sailboat, and hit the kill switch.

Later in the day, the girls met the man they saved, and his wife, at the hospital.

Margeaux said the event was all a blur.

"I had never taken any life-saving classes before," she said. "The water was freezing, and I don't even know how I was able to do it. I can hardly remember how I swam with him."

Margeaux added, "He was moving around everywhere and I think I just put my arm around his chest or over his shoulder to get him over to that family's boat."

Ann Denison, Margeaux's grandmother, was the first to see the girl following her heroic action.

"She just came home to me and didn't say anything. She was just shaking," Denison said. "When I asked her what was wrong, she



COURTESY PHOTO

Lacey Flanigan (left) and Margeaux Leakas, who saved an injured man in the water of Round Lake.

said, 'I just saved a man's life.' You could tell she was in shock."

She added, "I told her, 'you should feel lucky, not everyone gets the chance to save somebody's life.'"

Both of the girls work as camp counselors at the Belvedere,

where they'll be living for the summer.

"They really are very amazing girls," Denison said. "They did the right thing and I'm very proud of them."

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