

A south pier save

Life ring investment pays first dividend

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ST. JOSEPH — Life rings installed in June on the south pier in St. Joseph were used Monday to rescue a young man who was being overpowered by waves in Lake Michigan, officials said.

Scott Bousek, 19, of Peoria, Ill., was thrown two of the flotation devices by his father and pulled to safety in the 6:32 p.m. incident, according to St. Joseph police.

Bousek was treated at the scene by Medic I paramedics and declined an offer to be taken to the hospital for examination.

After a long study and numerous discussions, Berrien County commissioners approved the installation of life rings on stands at intervals along the south pier, which adjoins Silver Beach County Park, a major summer attraction.

County Commissioner Jeanette Leahey, who pushed hard for the life ring project, said the board's decision to go forward has already saved a life.

"This board did the right thing," she said after commissioners met Thursday.

Sheriff Paul Bailey said the focus of the project was to save lives.

"Now it's happened," he said.

At the time of Bousek's rescue, the weather was cool and breezy and swim-

ming conditions dangerous. Red warning flags were up at Silver Beach, a "no swimming" sign was posted at the gate, and other warning signs had been placed on life guard stations.

According to police, officers were dispatched to Silver Beach after a caller reported a person struggling in the water off the end of the south pier.

While police were en route, dispatchers notified the responding officers that the person was out of the water and walking toward the beach.

Bousek told police that he jumped into the lake and was overpowered by waves.

His father, Robert Bousek, said he quickly realized that his son was in trouble. He got two life rings, which have attached ropes, threw them to his son, and pulled the youth out of the water.

In addition to life rings, Berrien County has considered adopting an ordinance that would make pier jumping a civil infraction. The ordinance was tabled earlier this year in the county board's Administration Committee.

While considering a life ring program, officials said they were concerned that the devices would be stolen or vandalized. The loss of a large number of life rings prompted the county to end a life ring program in the 1990s.

But only one ring has disappeared since the devices were installed in mid-June, Sheriff Bailey said.

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Don Campbell / HP staff

Life rings on St. Joseph's south pier, like this one pictured in June on the structure, proved handy for a rescue Monday. An Illinois man was pulled to safety after struggling in a choppy Lake Michigan.