

Swimmers Must Be Aware of Rip Currents in Great Lakes

By Ryan Schlehuber

Thursday, July 28, will mark exactly seven years since Travis Brown of Gaylord drowned while swimming with friends off the Lake Michigan Sand Dunes, just 15 minutes northwest of St. Ignace. Strong rip currents swept the 12-year-old boy 500 feet from shore, and the anniversary, say county safety officials, provides a serious reminder that rip currents can ruin a summer day at local beaches.

Rip currents, or channel currents, are strong outward rushes of water that are still being studied by local marine experts. The way to escape these relatively

narrow currents, say experts, is to swim parallel to the shoreline, back into calmer water.

Justin Carrick of the Mackinac County Water Safety Review Team, a group supported by federal, state, and local emergency response units and businesses, said rip currents are as predictable as the weather, at best.

"Unfortunately, we are still unsure how often rip currents occur at the sand dunes and how long a person can be trapped in them," said Mr. Carrick. He said rip currents form in the Great Lakes and in oceans, but are rare or nonexistent in rivers, streams,

and small lakes.

The National Weather Service considers rip currents the third deadliest weather-related hazard, after heat waves and floods. They are deadlier than tornadoes, lightning, and hurricanes.

People often associate rip currents with oceans, said Donald Scavia, a professor in the School of Natural Resources and Environment at the University of Michigan. He is also the director of Michigan Sea Grant, a joint program between the University of Michigan and Michigan State University.

"If the beach is set up just

right, the water comes up on the shore and it will collect and shoot out in a small underwater river," said Professor Scavia. "That underwater river is, in fact, the rip current."

Nationally, more than 100 people die annually from rip currents. According to the Michigan Sea Grant, in the past two years at least 18 people have drowned in the Great Lakes, with experts believing most of these deaths to be a direct result of victims panicking when they were pulled from shore by a rip current.

Rip currents form when waves break near shore, piling up water between breaking waves and the beach. Sandbars, said Mr. Carrick, are where strong rip currents can form, too.

"You can be in knee-deep water and a rip current can knock you right off your feet," he said. "That's how strong they can be."

At the Sand Dunes, there are a couple of factors that can generate a rip current, said Mr. Carrick. One is a gentle breeze that can begin as far away as Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and can prolong currents into a long shore current to the Sand Dunes. Another is on-shore winds that can push water away from shore. "The further you get away from shore, rip currents tend to dissipate quicker," said Mr. Carrick.

When trapped in a rip current, experts believe a person cannot swim directly to shore and out of the current. The best way to escape a rip current, said Mr. Carrick, is to tread water and swim parallel to shore.

If caught in a rip current:

- Don't fight the current.
- Swim parallel to shore to get out of the current, then head back to shore at an angle.
- If you cannot escape, float calmly until the current slows.
- If you need help, call or wave for assistance.
- If assisting, be sure to have a floating device for yourself and the victim.
- Parents should not allow children to go swimming without a floating device.

"The wider the rip current, the less there is a chance of getting swept," he said. "A 30-foot wide rip current is considered a narrow rip current."

Professor Scavia suggests keeping calm and visualize stepping off a treadmill that you cannot turn off, but that you must exit by stepping off to either side.

"The most important thing is that if you get caught, simply relax and float, then swim parallel to the shore," he said. "It's easy to swim out of a rip current, but not up against it."

Mr. Carrick said new information is being learned about rip currents and radio broadcasts are now being posted to warn people when rip current weather is likely.

For more information, go on line to www.miseagrant.umich.edu, or call (734) 764-1118 for a free rip current brochure.

Michigan Politics

By George Weeks



Granholt Has Strong Finances of Her Own

Republican businessman Dick DeVos has the deepest-ever pockets of any candidate for governor of Michigan, and his family is second to none among GOP contributors.

But fret not for Gov. Jennifer Granholm. A Granholm-DeVos matchup would hardly be Little Orphan Annie vs. Daddy Warbucks.

At \$8 million, Granholm, who did not take public funding in her 2002 Democratic primary battle, far out-raised all other gubernatorial candidates that year. Look what she has already raised and spent for the next election that is 16 months down the road, what she's doing to raise more, and what she has contributed to other Democrats:

• According to the watchdog Michigan Campaign Finance Network (MCFN), Granholm "has raised \$2.6 million in her campaign account and increased its balance by \$900,000 to \$1,325,230. In the process she has spent \$1.7 million, of which \$1,175,000 counts against the \$2 million spending limit for a candidate who accepts public funding for the 2006 primary."

That makes it virtually certain that she'll again decline primary campaign public funding, even though she's not likely to have serious competition for another nomination.

All this underscores the broken condition of the gubernatorial public financing system: The spending limits are too low for candidates, and there's no limit on all of the independent expenditures that help the candidates--totaling \$13.5 million in the 2002 gubernatorial campaign.

MCFN Executive Director Rich Robinson said of 2002: "There is no prohibition against coordinating those efforts with a candidate committee, so the idea of insulating the candidates from the influence of big, special interest contributors was soundly defeated. Almost certainly, the same will be true in 2006."

• Granholm is accelerating finance efforts through her "G4 Team," a rah-rah bit standing for "Good Government, Go Granholm."

Next up is her effort to lure more "maxers," those who

make the maximum \$3,400 contribution. She plans to host a July 11 fundraiser at the Detroit Athletic Club, where such folks can watch the nationally televised Home Run Derby portion of baseball All-Star festivities.

In a letter asking each member of her finance committee to bring a new maxer to the All-Star party, her headquarters played the DeVos card:

"With the election just over a year away, and having a challenger facing off against us with a seemingly inexhaustible amount of funding, we need you...to 'step up to the plate' to bring the Governor one step closer to re-election."

Granholm also will have a fundraiser during the Detroit River boat races, and her traditional "Sweet September" biggie in Grand Rapids--DeVos

territory.

• The Granholm Leadership Fund, her political action committee to help other Democrats, raised \$464,191 for the 2004 election--second only to Republican Attorney General Mike Cox's \$675,959 among the PACs of elected officials.

Her \$228,000 contribution to the Michigan Democratic Party was second only to \$404,700 from the Michigan Trial Lawyers Association.

Granholm's PAC also made \$5,000 contributions to a dozen or so winning state House candidates in 2004.

Now Granholm is concentrating on raising big bucks for her own campaign.

George Weeks is the political columnist for The Detroit News and is syndicated by Superior Features.

Letter to the Editor

Reader Expresses Appreciation

To the Editor:

This is a letter that I have delayed writing for much too long. First and foremost I would like to thank Mr. Wes Maurer and his staff of writers for his excellent newspapers, *The Mackinac Island Town Crier* and *The St. Ignace News*. I appreciate it as a platform and for all of the outstanding articles. I must first recognize the column of my long-time, dear friend, Jeanette Doud,

for keeping us all informed of people and current events. I really enjoy the outstanding historical column of Frank Straus and the most informative articles by Candi Dunnigan, Trish Martin, and Dr. Silva. I also enjoy the occasional articles by my good friend, Dr. John McCabe.

On behalf of our community, I thank you all.

Kent Weber
Mackinac Island



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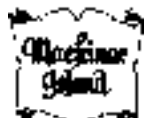
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