

ATYPICAL ACTION STAR



KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

ALAN RITCHSON SAYS JIM CARREY HAS INFLUENCED HIS ACTING MORE THAN CLINT EASTWOOD. D5

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Sunday



South Haven’s South beach fills with visitors on July 3 in anticipation of the Fourth of July holiday weekend and America’s 250th birthday celebration. Photos by Devin Anderson-Torrez, MLive.com

Liability, labor and cost are just some of the concerns in establishing a safety program at a popular tourist spot.

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SOUTH HAVEN — A swimmer exits Lake Michigan on a sunny Tuesday morning and approaches a lifeguard. “It looks like you’re going to have a slow morning,” the man tells the lifeguard. Then, the man collapses. The lifeguards jump into motion, doing CPR and jump-starting his heart with a defibrillator. He’s rushed to the hospital, suffering from cardiac arrest. This was Day 16 for the new lifeguards at South Haven’s South Beach. The hiring of the nine-lifeguard team was celebrated this spring, ending the city’s controversial 25-year hiatus without them. And the man who collapsed? That was Jeff Filbrandt — the husband of South Haven Mayor Annie Brown. “I want to thank everyone who was involved ... in saving the life of my husband,” Brown said at the next City Council meeting. “Doctors and nurses told me that I should buy lottery tickets because Jeff was lucky to be alive.” Only 10% of people who suffer cardiac arrest outside a hospital survive it, according to the American Red Cross.



Lifeguards keep watch over the South Haven beach and Lake Michigan on July 3.

One doctor told Brown her husband was alive “specifically because trained and highly qualified lifeguards were there.” “Things can kind of just unexpectedly occur,” David Figueredo, South Haven’s new chief lifeguard, said about the incident. “We’re trained and ready for everything up to our standard of care.” MLive reached out to Brown multiple times for this story, but she didn’t respond for comment.

TO HAVE AND HAVE NOT

Despite Lake Michigan’s deadly record, very few of its beaches have lifeguards anymore.

South Haven ditched its program in 2001, eight years after Michigan removed lifeguards from all state park beaches. Only two other Lake Michigan beaches in Lower Michigan have lifeguards — Silver Beach in St. Joseph and New Buffalo Beach. Decision-makers point to cost and liability concerns. For years, people pleaded with South Haven to bring lifeguards back. The wait is over. The small beach town of 4,000 is bucking the trend. The white watchtowers are in place. Here’s a look inside South Haven’s lifeguard experiment, two months in.

A HISTORY OF TRAGEDY

South Haven’s South Beach is known for pristine sands and its iconic red light-house. But it’s also no stranger to drownings. Since lifeguards stopped patrolling the beach in 2001, there have been 12 drownings, according to the U.S. Lifesaving Association. The victims include a 3-year-old, a 7-year-old and a 13-year-old. Lynn Bettenhausen has been on the beach with family when helicopters, police cars and U.S. Coast Guard boats arrived for an emergency. “It’s horrible,” Bettenhausen said, avoiding going into detail. Residents were asking for the city to reinstate the lifeguard program and “we listened,” City Manager Kate Hosier said through a public relations agency. SEE LAKE MICHIGAN, A3

MICHIGAN HEALTH

Falling vaccine rates a concern amid 35-year measles high

State officials are calling on families to catch up on immunizations before the school year begins.

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Michigan’s vaccine waiver rate for school-age students was 3.1% in 2015. That rate doubled to 6.2% during the 2024-25 school year, and preliminary data indicated a continued increase last year, according to the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services. Fewer children vaccinated against diseases like measles, mumps, and pertussis means greater susceptibility to community outbreaks, which are becoming more common in Michigan and across the country. The U.S. has already seen more measles infections in 2026 than any year since 1991. That total — 2,318 cases according to the CDC — is higher than all of last year (2,289) with five months still to play out. Michigan accounted for 14 measles cases this year, including 11 associated with outbreaks this spring in Washtenaw and Ottawa counties. Those outbreaks are in the rearview, but health officials and community advocates are urging parents to make sure their children are caught up on vaccines recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics with a return to school on the horizon. “There was a point back in the spring where we were really concerned that this disease would find its way into an under-vaccinated community and would just spread like wildfire,” said Ryan Malosh, director of Michigan’s division of immunization. “It’s really important that we maintain a high level of coverage because these kids who are unvaccinated, they represent real individuals, real people who are at risk of these diseases.” Measles is one of the most transmissible diseases around, capable of remaining in the air for hours after an infected person leaves a room. Common symptoms include high fever, cough and rash. SEE MICHIGAN HEALTH, A2

IN YESTERDAY’S EDITION

Felt Mansion provides glimpse of 1920s

Dorr Felt decided to build a house in the rolling dunes between Holland and Saugatuck in 1925. The Felt Mansion still stands today, a public door into history. Miss a day, miss a story. The Kalamazoo Gazette publishes every day at reader.kg.mlive.com

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