



from saving Souls to saving Lives

78-year-old retired priest may be world's oldest lifeguard

By Lee Nelson
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He twists his tanned waist and arms in the crystal blue water. The lyrics, "Rock and roll is here to stay," plays from the cassette player nearby.

"OK, ladies. Let's do jumping jacks now," James "Jay" Janssen says to the women in the pool. "Push the water down with your hands." His sunglasses and baseball cap guard him from the harsh sun rays as he gracefully leaps in the pool.

Janssen recorded many of the oldies but goodies music himself from his large collection of 45 RPM records. He loves the old rock and roll

stars such as Chuck Berry and Jerry Lee Lewis because they have a fervent beat. The music helps him and his water aerobics' class get into a spirited mood to tighten and tone their bodies.

It's 8 a.m., and James is full of energy already. That might be difficult for many people his age. In three months, he'll turn 78. According to the "Guinness Book of

'He's a scream to be around. I've had both hips replaced, and this helps so much. I love it.'

DeETTA MONTGOMERY
Member of Janssen's class

World Records" the oldest lifeguard is a 77-year-old man from North Carolina.

But being a water aerobics instructor and a lifeguard has kept Janssen feeling much younger. It's not about records.

"I just need to keep active. I don't want to just sit around."

Many in his classes still call him "Father." But retired priest James Janssen doesn't don a collar anymore. He's more into swimming trunks and a beach towel. He works this summer at the Davenport Outing Club's new pool. The rest of the year, he lifeguards and teaches a water course for those with arthritis at the Scott County Family Y in Davenport.

"He's a scream to be around," says DeEtta Montgomery of Davenport. She and seven other ladies join Janssen three days a week for classes at the Outing Club. "I've had both hips replaced, and this helps so much. I love it."

Another classmate, Sue Schwab of Bettendorf, says the women talk



Photos by Larry Fisher/QUAD-CITY TIMES

Retired priest James Janssen lifeguards at the Davenport Outing Club pool. He is almost 79 years old and also teaches water aerobics.

RECORD HOLDER?

A recent story from North Carolina, which ran in the Quad-City Times July 11, stated a 77-year-old man there received his certificate from the "Guinness Book of World Records" saying he is the world's oldest lifeguard.

"He's just a kid," Davenport's James Janssen said. "I can beat that record."

Janssen, who turns 78 in three months, lifeguards at Davenport's Outing Club and the Scott County Family Y.

To become eligible for the record, Janssen must make his case to the people in London who authorize potential records. In fact, he can use this newspaper article to plead his case. An independent corroboration in the form of media coverage must be provided to verify any claim, according to the official Guinness Record guidelines.

Of the 60,000 categories for all the records around the world, only about 4,000 ever make it in to the yearly book.

But for now, Janssen is just enjoying the sunshine and his ability to do what he does at his age.

"OK, ladies. Let's do the rocking horse in the water," he says as he finishes up the aerobics part of his lessons at the Outing Club pool.

He won't settle for a rocking chair.

— Lee Nelson



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Lifeguard: Swimming helps ease arthritis pain

Continued from Page B1 about recipes and other things while Janssen gets them moving in the water.

"My husband had him as a Scout leader," she adds. "He's really helping me. I can feel a difference in my clothes."

Janssen retired in 1991 as a priest in the Catholic Diocese of Davenport, where he had served since 1948. He served in more than a dozen parishes around the area. His health wasn't that great. He was having problems with arthritis in his knees.

He never dreamed at that time that his second career would be in lifeguarding.

But swimming has been a passion of his since he was an Eagle Scout at Camp Abe Lincoln and as a scout leader. Even during his priesthood in churches in and around the Quad-City area, he dabbled in lifeguarding including a stint in 1954 at the pool in Newton, Iowa. He keeps the billfold-sized card certifying him in lifesav-

ing techniques from that year.

During the Senior Olympics in the 1980s, Janssen took first place in all the swimming events.

"I was up and down the pool before the others even were down one lane. I decided to drop out in 1988 and let other people have a chance."

But he just kind of fell into the job of lifeguard.

"My knee was bothering me with arthritis. By taking a water class at the Y, I felt better. I didn't have to have surgery."

He decided to get re-certified, and then was asked if he wanted to teach a class.

"I like people. And this is something I really like to do. Plus, people don't think that I'm that old."

Kari Basler, interim aquatic director at the Y, enjoys working with Janssen.

"He gets along with everybody. He is incredibly caring. He may forget your name, but he always recognizes people."