STACEY AT MJ FUNK

UNPLANNED STOP

Chicago boaters forced to make detour to Cape when engine fails

BY TONY HALL
Southeast Missourian

For Jim O'Malley and a group of boaters traveling from Chicago to New Orleans, life on the Mississippi has been postponed.

Cape Girardeau firefighters came to their rescue Saturday afternoon when one of two motors failed on their 24-foot pontoon.

Firefighters said the boaters were fortunate, since the situation could have become life-threatening.

"If their other motor would have went out, they would have floating down river out of control," Capt. Charles Brawley said.

The group of five had set out from Chicago on the Illinois River Friday, traveling about 150 miles downriver each day.

On Saturday afternoon, the boat's 90-horsepower motor died as they were approaching Cape Girardeau.

Although O'Malley said he and two other men in the boat weren't adrift in the Mississippi River, their remaining 15-horse motor limited their maneuverability among driftwood and other obstacles.

"The barges here are scary," he said.

O'Malley called Larry Curran, who was taking his turn driving the van the group uses to follow the boat by land in case of emergencies.

Curran stopped a police car on Water Street, and asked for help.

"We weren't scared," Curran said. "It was just a safety precaution."

Using a 16-foot rescue boat, firefighters floated downriver from Honker's Boat Dock trying to locate the pontoon. It took several minutes, since the boat was hidden by barges, Brawley said.

The rescue boat guided the pontoon off the river and into the Diversion Channel. The operation took almost an hour with the pontoon boat's small motor and headwind.

As O'Malley stood on solid ground in a pair of wet socks, he said he was glad to have met the firefighters, along with others during his short trip along the Mississippi.

"I think the pizza is on me tonight," he said.

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When one of two engines on their pontoon malfunctioned on the Mississippi River Saturday, Jim O'Malley and his daughter, Sara O'Malley, of Chicago made an unplanned stop at Cape Girardeau with three friends.

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