

Realtors work to keep Maui's beaches safe

By SARAH RUPPENTHAL

South Maui's beaches just got a little bit safer thanks to the Rotary Club of Kihei-Wailea, which raised funds to install 28 life-saving rescue tubes at six beach parks last month. As part of a two-year community service project, the club was granted permission by the county to purchase and install the rescue tubes — sentinel flotation equipment that is used to stabilize distressed swimmers before rescue — at Kalama Beach Park, Cove Park, Charley Young Beach and all three Kamaole Beach Parks.

On the morning of May 27, a group of Rotarians met at the north end of Kalama Beach Park and worked their way south, installing rescue tubes every 300 feet. Among them were four Realtors Association of Maui members: Karin Carlson of NextHome Pacific Properties, Kathleen Tezak of Elite Pacific Properties, and Lauren Arnold and Mark Harbison of Coldwell Banker Island Properties.

"These devices save lives," Carlson said. "We have so



many visitors here on Maui who have no knowledge of how powerful the ocean can be. Even a seemingly small shore break can wreak havoc on unsuspecting visitors who are in areas where there is no pounding surf."

Arnold, who once worked as a beach patrol guard on the East Coast, is all too familiar with the inherent dangers of the ocean.

"I do not take it for granted that I grew up next to the ocean and sometimes it feels like I was born knowing how to swim, how to spot rip currents and how to get out of them," she said.

"I remember moving out

here and wondering why there weren't more lifeguard stands. I think sometimes people who visit here get swept away in all the beauty that is Maui and forget the ocean can be very dangerous. Even people who live here sometimes forget."

The need for ocean safety devices like rescue tubes cannot be overstated. Rogue waves, rip tides and strong currents can appear out of nowhere, and occur more often than most realize.

According to the state Department of Health, ocean drownings are the second leading cause of fatal injuries in Maui County, and are responsible for more deaths than vehicular or motorcycle accidents. In addition, of Maui island's 114 drowning deaths from 2005 to 2014, more than a quarter occurred in South Maui waters. And of Maui County's 139 drowning deaths from 2006 to 2015, 101, or 73 percent, were visitors.

The newly installed rescue tubes are hard to miss — and that's a good thing. The bright, banana-yellow cylindrical flotation devices are conspicuously placed at the high-water mark mauka of the



RAM members (from left) Kathleen Tezak, Lauren Arnold, Karin Carlson and Mark Harbison, along with fellow Rotary Club of Kihei-Wailea member Sally Dean, take a break from installing rescue tubes at six South Maui beach parks on May 27.

vegetation line. The tubes are mounted on tall poles topped with a yellow flag. The poles are equipped with a GPS position locator so 911 dispatchers will know where to send emergency responders.

The tubes, which are designed to keep three adults afloat, are outfitted with a 10-foot-long tether line at one end. In an emergency situation, bystanders can toss the

tube or, if they can safely do so, swim out with it so the distressed swimmer can hold on to it until emergency responders arrive.

"The average person can take the flotation device and safely get them back to shore, without becoming one of the victims," Carlson explained.

Later this month, the Rotary Club of Kihei-Wailea plans to install additional res-

cue tubes at Keawakapu Beach and hopes to raise enough funds to purchase the devices for other south shore beaches that do not have lifeguards. The club bought the rescue tubes from the Rescue Tube Foundation, a Kauai-based organization that aims to lower the incidence of drowning by providing a sufficient number of these life-saving devices at recreational aquatic environments throughout the state.

"These rescue tubes can save an infinite number of lives in the future," Arnold said. "I am really proud to be a part of this community effort."

To learn more about the Rotary Club of Kihei-Wailea, visit www.mauirotary.org. For more information about the club's rescue tube project or to make a donation, email Mary Margaret Baker at topchick@sbcglobal.net.

■ *Do you know a RAM member who should be recognized for their contributions to the community? If so, send your story idea to Sarah Ruppenthal at missruppenthal@gmail.com.*