

Michael Newman

Baywatch star Michael Newman has died after being diagnosed with Parkinson's disease in 2006, PEOPLE can confirm. He was 67. Newman's close friend, Matt Felker — who directed the recent Hulu docuseries *After Baywatch: Moment in the Sun* — revealed the late actor died "from heart complications" on the evening of Sunday, Oct. 20 "surrounded by his family and friends."

"I got to see Mike the last time he was conscious, and he looked [at] me and in typical Mike fashion said, 'You're just in time,' " Felker tells PEOPLE.

Los Angeles-born Newman rose to fame in the '90s as mainstay TV lifeguard Mike "Newmie" Newman on the long-running series and was the only member of the hit cast who actually was a lifeguard. He appeared in 150 episodes of the series, which ran from 1989-2001 — more episodes of the show than anyone other than David Hasselhoff.

Newman was also a full-time firefighter and maintained his schedule at the firehouse while filming the show. When the series ended its run, he continued firefighting until he retired after 25 years.

The star spent recent years raising money with the Michael J. Fox Foundation to help find a cure for Parkinson's. While speaking to PEOPLE in August, Newman said he hoped "the telling of my personal story brings awareness to the importance of finding a Parkinson's cure."

The retired actor added of his diagnosis, "This terminal disease has allowed me a lot of thinking time, which I maybe didn't want, but it's brought me wisdom."

"My body has changed so slowly that I hardly notice it, yet I am constantly reminded that Parkinson's has now become the center of my life," he said while promoting *After Baywatch: Moment in the Sun*. Diagnosed at age 50, Newman discussed living with the disease in the Felker-directed doc, revealing he took 10 medications a day and would often wake up "jittery."

"I am cherishing the days that I get to be on this earth with family and friends. I'm taking life seriously," he told PEOPLE, adding, "It's not a run-through."

Baywatch followed a team of lifeguards led by Lieutenant Mitch Buchannon (Hasselhoff) as they saved lives, dealt with personal dramas, fought crime, and participated in daily adventures on a Los Angeles beach. Newman starred in the show alongside actors including Pamela Anderson, Nicole Eggert, Yasmine Bleeth and Jeremy Jackson.

He reprised his role in the three episodes of the 1995 spinoff series *Baywatch Nights*.

Speaking with PEOPLE, Newman expressed his thanks to Felker for giving him the opportunity to tell his story in the Baywatch documentary, which began streaming in August. "Matt Felker, in the making of this documentary, has given me and other Baywatch cast members a chance to tell our stories as they truly reflect our real lives," he said. "This opportunity means a lot to me."

Newman is survived by his wife, Sarah, whom he married 36 years ago. The couple share two grown children: son Chris and daughter Emily. They also have a 1-year-old granddaughter, Charlie.

Before his diagnosis, Newman was planning to retire with Sarah in Hawaii and had even built their dream home just two blocks from where the spinoff *Baywatch: Hawaii* had been filmed.

"Life is short," Newman told PEOPLE. "It is something I didn't often give myself a chance to think about before my Parkinson's diagnosis."