

Encouraging Summer Splashing

Variety of Water Sports Make for Unique Summer Experiences

MY BEST FRIEND and her family are bona fide lake people. They live for the lake—or at least they did throughout my formative years. So it may go without saying that I grew up a latch-on lake person. Though, unfortunately, I haven't stepped on a boat in years, I remain a wannabe lake goer.

Thanks to my friend's charitable family who were stuck with me tagging along all those years, I learned to waterski and wasted away my youthful summer days with some serious outdoor play, fried fish and just about no TV. Bliss. What I didn't think about at the time is waterskiing is an incredible family sport. After all, I wasn't just hanging out with my friend all summer. She and I spent long days on the boat with her brother, mom and dad. When I hit the lake with other friends of mine, it was always with their families, too. It's interesting how much freedom and joy I felt out on the lake, yet I was always under the watchful eye of my friends' parents.

Now that I'm a mom, I wish these sorts of experiences for my own sons and their buddies. In speaking with Greg Kuenning,

president of Ohio Water Ski Association and coach of the University of Cincinnati water ski team, I realized I'm not the only one who has come to this conclusion. "What makes water skiing unique from other sports is the family aspect of it. The family gets together and goes out on the boat for an extended period of time.. There are not many things a family can do together anymore and bond. Water skiing is a great tool for that."

The association is hosting a junior development clinic this July for kids ages 17 and younger of all skill levels. Learn more about the two-day clinic at www.skiowsa.com. Kuenning also recommends the Midwest Water Ski and Wakeboard School in Columbus, which offers summer camps June through August for kids ages 8 and up.

Another resource for families is the new Wake Nation Cincinnati, which bills itself as the first cable wakeboarding park in the tri-state area. Without a boat, people can water ski, wakeboard, kneeboard or

wakeskate on this new man-made lake with the help of an advanced cable system.

Before getting wet, however, Kuenning believes it's important for kids to be comfortable swimming in a life jacket and he cautions that when it comes to life jackets, you usually get what you pay for. Parents should look for life jackets that are Coast Guard approved.

There are other great opportunities for Cincinnati kids interested in what I might refer to as lower-tech water sports like kayaking and canoeing. Obviously, many local camps include canoeing in their summer programs. One that centers much of its activity around canoeing and kayaking is called RiverTrek and is offered through the Cincinnati Recreation Commission. RiverTrek is an opportunity for area teens to paddle more than 60 miles of the Little Miami Scenic River. Mark Celsor, east regional supervisor with the Cincinnati Recreation Commission, says RiverTrek is an opportunity for kids to connect with nature and each other in a way most youth no longer get to experience. "Water

sports, especially for inner city kids, is not something they get to do. This is a way to immerse yourself, to live and camp along the river. A lot of kids don't get to do this anymore." He says it is a sort of "coming of age" experience in which the kids pull together as a team as they learn to paddle as a unit and work as a team to make the week a success. "Like we tell them," he adds, "mom and dad aren't here anymore and neither are your cell phones."

I agree with that attitude and tend to feel that water sports provide kids, and the rest of us, unique opportunity to connect with nature and one another in a very real way that we can no longer afford to take for granted. Fortunately, there are ample ways for Cincinnati's kids to experience water sports this summer. And regardless of the ultimate goal—be it for pure fun or competition—water sports are good for body and soul.



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