

Chain gets first life jacket station

BY GREG SEUBERT
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WAUPACA – Chain O' Lakes boaters might have noticed the newest addition to the Taylor Lake public boat landing.

The state Department of Natural Resources teamed up with the town of Farmington and Waupaca Chain O' Lakes Association to provide a Kids Don't Float life jacket loaner station at the popular landing located off of Otter Drive just west of Waupaca.

The DNR provided plans, signage and about 30 red and blue life jackets ranging in size from infant to XXL for adults. The association funded the building materials and volunteers built, installed and will maintain the station.

The Kids Don't Float program features free day-use of life jackets, also known as personal flotation devices.

"People don't float," said Dan Johnson, a member of the Waupaca Chain O' Lakes Association and a boating safety instructor. "The one thing that will save their life is having a working life jacket. If you take a look at the number of (boating-related) fatalities per year, the primary reason why there's a fatality is because that person was not wearing a life jacket. It's important to have them readily accessible if you're on a paddle boat, if you're on a pontoon boat, if you're on a motor boat." "Life jackets or personal flotation devices are an extremely important piece of equipment to have when you're going out boating," local DNR conservation warden Jonathan Kaiser said. "In most situations, you aren't required to wear them, you are simply required to have one of the appropriate size for each person on the boat, all the way up from paddle boards to kayaks to canoes to large motor boats. What we have found is from paddle



The state Department of Natural Resources, town of Farmington and Waupaca Chain O' Lakes Association have teamed up to provide day-use of life jackets for children and adults. The jackets are located at the Chain's Taylor Lake public boat landing. From left are DNR conservation warden Jonathan Kaiser; town of Farmington chairperson Caroline Murphy; and Rose Spaar and Dan Johnson with the Waupaca Chain O' Lakes Association. Greg Seubert Photos

boards up to very large boats is boating-related drownings or large injury accidents often could have been far less worse if people had been wearing their PFD.

"If you are out floating on the water, technically, you're supposed to have one," he said. "We're always going to recommend that folks wear them, even if you're a good swimmer. Someone's ability to swim is not as relevant simply because you don't know what's going to happen. Something could happen after dark, you could be knocked unconscious where something like swimming isn't going to help you. By having one or wearing one, you may be able to save someone else who finds themselves in a predicament."

Volunteers installed the station June 22 and the jackets are being used, according to Johnson.

"We saw that other communities have them and we know the DNR supports Kids Don't Float," he said. "Why not have the initiative to do it here? We have the volunteers to help build them and monitor them."

"It's nice to have it here because it is one of the main



About 30 life jackets ranging in size from infant to adult XXL can be used for free at the Chain O' Lakes' public boat landing on Taylor Lake.

landings," he added. "A lot of people come in and go boating and they may not have the right size life jacket for the people that are going to be on board. The biggest thing we see is they don't have infant life jackets because kids grow so quickly. They may not have the right-sized life jacket and now they can grab one and use it for the day."

Stations are typically set up on water bodies with considerable boat traffic.

"We're hoping we can get them on other locations on the Chain," Johnson said.

One of those public landings on Knight Lane provides access to Upper Chain lakes – including Pope, Manomin,

Orlando Knight and Marl – and is a popular launch site for canoes, kayaks and small boats.

"We need to work with the town of Dayton to make that happen because we need the permission from the town to put that there," Johnson said. "The one over by (Indian Crossing Casino) is another place."

Kaiser would also like to see more boxes on the Chain's boat landings.

"There was talk about having a similar setup at the Knight Lane landing," he said. "There are a ton of canoes and kayaks, hundreds if not more

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on a busy holiday weekend. We want to work closely to cosponsor them, get them set up and help with the logistics. It often comes down to an individual or group that wants to run with it and get them set up. This is something that isn't new to the DNR. These stations have been going up for probably a decade or better.

I think it's a pretty well-oiled machine as far as the process now."

Besides providing free day-use life jackets, the station is also a place to bring jackets are aren't used anymore.

"If people are not using their life jacket anymore and it's in good working condition, they can bring them here," Johnson said. "We see throughout the state that that's

what people do. When they're done using a life jacket, they'll bring them in and let somebody else use them."

"It's a very visible sign as to what the rules are as well as making people aware that, 'Oh yeah, I should double-check my PFDs,'" Kaiser said. "If they don't have enough, we have a great, free resource here for the community to help keep people safer."
