Golden Corner Lakes Sail and Power Squadron dedicated to safety, fun

BY GREG OLIVER
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SENECA — With the school year ending this week and temperatures getting warmer by the day, many families will be spending more time on the lake during the summer months. That often means increased boating use and, unfortunately, more accidents that result in injury or even death.

The Golden Corner Lakes Sail and Power Squadron — comprised of some 100 members, which are part of 40,000 across the country — is concerned that people who operate watercraft exercise safety. One of 450 squadrons that make up the United States Power Squadrons — the world's largest private, nonprofit boating organizations — they offer America's Boating Course and Partner in Command boating safety classes to the public.

"When you join the squadron and see people on the lake, you realize that many people are not educated in boating and violations," said Ron Osburn, executive officer of the organization. "It's not that they're doing anything intentionally wrong, but they don't know, and there's no requirement to take a boating course even though we wish there were."

Osburn said the biggest cause of boating deaths each year is operator error.

"The (Department of Natural Resources) said the thing they give the most tickets for is improper lights, such as not having their lights on when they should be," he said.

America's Boating Course and Partner in Command boating safety classes are offered to the public by the squadron several times a year. There is no age limit for participants although it is requested that a parent accompany young adults under age 16.

Young people who wish to operate a watercraft of more than 15 horsepower without an adult in the boat or personal watercraft must complete America's Boating Course to comply with state certification requirements.

"Basic boating laws and the use of trailers as well as washing a boat, what life vests to wear and proper use of fire extinguishers are covered in the course," said Osburn, who also serves as an instructor. "There are four two-hour sessions held each Monday with a boating exam given at the end of the course. Most insurance companies also offer a discount for those taking the course."

Other courses offered by the squadron include navigation, weather, engine maintenance, cruise planning, how to use a GPS and charting. Overall, Osburn said there are some 12 different courses and seminars.

The United States Power Squadron was organized in 1914, and the Golden Corner District 26 Chapter, of which Osburn is a member, is drawn predominantly from South Carolina and Georgia surrounding lakes Hartwell, Keowee and Jocassee.

Members of the Golden Corner Lakes Sail and Power Squadron are eligible for elective office and voting at general meetings (members over 18), taking educational courses, earning merit marks, subscriptions to squadron, district and national publications, flying the USPS ensign, among other things.

But the organization is also about more than just boating safety, though that is critically important in an area encompassed by lakes.

Osburn said the chapter conducts four to five fundraisers a year and also holds a barbecue for the Tribble Center that includes boat rides for consumers. The most recent event was held late last month.

"We really have a good time with them and they love it — they absolutely love them," said Jeanne Weiland, membership secretary.

Osburn said the local squad-

:on chapter began working with :he Tribble Center in 2006, and 30 consumers and eight staff members took part in this year's event. Weiland and Jack Ackerman, working with an estimated 25 squadron members, were the hosts this year.

"When they come in, the first :hing we do is for members to ›ring their pontoon boats in and :ven those in wheelchairs get › participate in an hour-long boat ride," Osburn said. "While they're gone, volunteers come in and grill hamburgers and hotdogs and the like, and we have a big picnic as well as games, such as a beanbag toss. After lunch, we give each one a gift card to Wal-Mart."

Osburn said taking Tribble Center consumers on their annual boat ride "is probably one of the highlights of our squadron as far as our civic participation."

"A lot of them have never been on a boat," Osburn said. "(Oconee Board of Disabilities and Special Needs executive director) Jerry (Mize) said consumers start asking about the event in February and it is something they look forward to.

"We provide them all a life vest and they enjoy it, although some will choose to stay back and play games. It's one of the highlights we do."

Mize said he is appreciative of what the squadron does for the Tribble Center.

"The Golden Corner Lakes and Power Squadron is made up of a great group of caring people who spend their time, efforts and money to have this event each year," Mize said, adding that last year was the ninth year.

The first year Mize said he was contacted concerning the event, he said approximately 25 were invited. It turned out to be so successful and something the Tribble Center enjoyed so much that more consumers have been invited each year thereafter.

"Some of these clients would have never had the opportunity to ride in a boat if the Power Squadron had not decided nine years ago to hold this event for the Tribble Center clients," Mize said.

Another event Osburn said the Golden Corner Lakes Sail and Power Squadron was involved in recently was the USA Triathlon event that involved both the Seneca and Clemson areas.

Anyone interested in becoming a member of the organization can call Osburn at (864) 972-2434. For boating course information, call (864) 985-0788 or (864) 973-4889 or email boatingsafeupstate@gmail.com. For more, visit gclsaps.com.

Safety in the sun





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Above: Gene Kunkel of the Golden Corner Lakes Sail and Power Squadron and consumers from the Tribble Center are all smiles during their recent boating outing that culminated with a barbecue. **Left:** Kathy Redford, past commander of the Golden Corner Lakes Sail and Power Squadron, helps Richard Holland with his life jacket.



Brian Hackley of the Golden Corner Lakes Sail and Power Squadron provides life vest safety tips to Tribble Center consumers prior to their recent boating outing and cookout.



Ron Osburn, left, and Lyn Geiben with the Golden Corner Lakes Sail and Power Squadron set up a table with name tags. The squadron recently hosted 60 consumers and eight staff members from the Tribble Center for a boat outing and cookout, an event that has taken place for nine years.