Warmer waters



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Kelsey Thornton, left, and Kristin Hanifin, members of the Syracuse University women's rowing team, lift their shell in preparation for rowing on Lake Hartwell. Colleges and university rowing teams from throughout the Northeast are choosing the university beach in Clemson to use for training because of the warmer temperatures and availability of two race courses, among other things.

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Rowing teams return to Clemson beach

BY GREG OLIVER
THE JOURNAL

CLEMSON — College students often head to Florida or other warm-weather destinations for spring break. However, when it comes to rowing teams throughout the Northeast and Midwest, Clemson is often the preferred destination.

But rather than trying to get a suntan or frolic on the beach, these young people are in Tigertown to enjoy water for a different reason. They are members of college and university rowing teams that are preparing for their upcoming seasons in an area considerably more conducive for training than the weather conditions they left behind.

This week, rowing teams consisting of the U.S. Coast Guard Academy men and women, Notre Dame men, Syracuse men and women and Boston University men and women have been seen in the mornings and afternoons at university beach. Meanwhile, Ohio State Uni-

SEE ROWING, PAGE A3

ROWING: 'The town is very hospitable'

FROM PAGE A1

versity and the Canadian national team launched across the lake at the Clemson University boathouse.

Phil Brunner, head coach of the Notre Dame men's rowing team, said this year marked his team's first visit to Clemson.

"We joined the ACC; we might as well see what ACC territory is like," joked Brunner.

Brunner said he and his team, which consists of 35 members, have been impressed with what they've seen so far.

"The town is very hospitable, and dealing with Clemson University and the Clemson Area Chamber of Commerce has been great," Brunner said.

Each team brings its own rowing equipment, also known as shells, to university beach. Before taking the shells into Lake Hartwell for morning and afternoon sessions, team members spent time conducting stretching exercises and jogging.

Brunner said Lake Hartwell is the perfect place to train.

"There's a ton of water to row on, and that works out well because there's a lot of teams here," he said.

Justin Moore, head coach of the 42-member Syracuse University women's rowing team, said he saw more recreational boats on the water earlier this week when temperatures were warmer. But he added there were no problems.

"It's a big body of water, and we realize we need to still go and practice and do so when there isn't much recreational traffic," Moore said. "However, people have been kind and tried to cooperate."

This marks the fourth year Syracuse has trained at university beach, and Moore said the large body of water and the two race courses that are available are tremendous draws.

"We like the fact that Clemson has a natural course and the other a city course (consisting of a three-lane course on the other side of the lake the Clemson Area Chamber of Commerce installed several years ago)," Moore said. "Whoever was responsible for that second course should be congratulated.

"There's no way we could afford to fly to Florida to train compared to busing to Clemson. Coming to Clemson is more affordable, as long as the weather is great."

Clemson and Clemson University have welcomed rowing teams every year but one since 1994. The lone exception came in 2008, when severe drought conditions forced cancellation. Chamber tourism director Lindsey Newton has estimated each team will have about a $100,000 economic impact on the community — especially through hotels, gas and a rental fee paid to store equipment.

Last year's total economic impact to the community was just less than $900,000.

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