Safety first this Labor Day weekend

BY STEPHANIE JADRNICEK
THE JOURNAL

SENECA — Several weeks ago, three adults, a 2-year-old and a pregnant mother were rushed to the hospital after an explosion threw them from their boat.

The boat had just launched from a ramp on the Georgia side of Lake Hartwell, according to media reports. Officials said a ventilation issue appeared to have sparked the blast and recommended that a boat's blowers should always run for five minutes before and after fueling

"The last I heard, the father, his wife and their son are all in the burn unit in Augusta," Golden Corner Lakes Sail and Power Squadron commander Ron Osburn said. "Had he taken a boating course, he would have known, or at least been told, to run that blower for five minutes to get those fumes out of there, because that's one of the dangers."

That is one of many tips participants learn from the squadron's beginner's boating course offered throughout the year. The squadron will host its next course on Thursdays, Sept. 22-Oct. 20 from 6:30-8:30 p.m. in the Oconee Room at Oconee Memorial Hospital.

Sue Dragoo, the squadron's public relations officer, recently completed the course. She moved to the Upstate about three years ago from the Chicago area.

"My husband wanted me to learn how to pilot the boat just as well as he could in case of an emergency," she said. "One of my biggest concerns was not only learning how to operate my boat, but on a lake that I know nothing about. I'm very concerned about safety — safety for anybody who goes out on the boat with me."

The class is designed to advance public boating knowledge and skills for safer boating in the Upstate. Participants learn about boat handling and seamanship, needed equipment, rules of boating, lines and knots, charts and aids for navigation, engine troubleshooting and boat trailering.

"The materials that were given covered a wide range of topics, such as the rules and regulations in this area for owning and operating a boat, safety requirements and the equipment that is required to be on a boat, along with some practical information about aids for navigation," Dragoo said. "It also included a lot of tips about what you should look out for."

Squadron members also have access to advanced educational courses such as on-the-water training, weather, sailing, cruise planning, engine maintenance and marine electronics. Dragoo said she greatly benefited from on-the-water training.

"We learned things like docking your boat — that seems to be the biggest challenge for a lot of people," she said. "We also did exercises such as man overboard — if someone should happen to fall overboard, how can you navigate to get to them quickly. We also covered how to anchor your boat in the lake."

The course gave her the confidence to get out on the lake and pilot her own boat, while avoiding some of the common mistakes inexperienced boaters make.

Osburn said one of the most important services the squadron offers is the vessel safety checks to ensure the boat and its equipment comply with federal, state and local safety requirements.

"It's a free service provided by the squadron to the public and can save both money and worry about being prepared for an emergency," he said. "A vessel safety check may help prevent citations, identify possible equipment defects and costly breakdowns, increase safe boating practices to help avoid accidents and injuries and provide a better understanding and use and care of marine safety equipment."

The squadron also donates life jackets to loaner programs and lobbies the legislature to mandate boating education requirements.

Osburn said Labor Day weekend is the last big boating hurrah of the season, so he encourages everyone to keep their eyes wide open out on the lake.

"One of the things we teach in the class is, unlike a highway, in the boating world boats can come at you from 360 degrees," he said. "So you always have to be vigilant and watchful."

stephanie@upstatetoday.com | (864) 973-6686

WANT TO GO?

What: America's Boating Course
When: Thursdays, Sept. 22-Oct. 20; 6:30-8:30 p.m.
Where: Oconee Room at Oconee Memorial Hospital
Cost: $30 for manual and supplies
Two-week pre-registration required.
For more information, call (864) 985-0788 or email mjstroven@bellsouth.net



SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL

Before heading out on the lake, have Golden Corner Lakes Sail and Power Squadron perform a free vessel safety check on the boat.