STAYING AFLOAT

Vests, knowledge key to boating safety

BY NORMAN CANNADA
THE JOURNAL

SENECA — For boating safety instructor Ron Osburn, the recent accidents involving jet skis on Lake Keowee and a pontoon boat on Lake Hartwell were a reason for sadness more than anything else.

"It saddens me, because I think that was probably preventable," Osburn said of the Aug. 31 accidents that caused injuries to three on Lake Keowee and left two children dead on Lake Hartwell. "The accidents may not have been preventable, but if everybody had a life vest on — if those kids had life vests on — they would probably be alive today. I think it's really sad that common sense doesn't say, 'Whether it's the law or not, they're wearing life vests.'"

Osburn works with the Golden Corner Lakes Sail and Power Squadron, which covers lakes Keowee, Hartwell and Jocassee.

The organization also offers safe boating courses. A new five-week course will start Thursday night at

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Oconee Medical Center.

"Daily, I see violations," he said. "I was on my dock the other day and saw a pontoon boat leave the state park. It's illegal to sit out on the front of a pontoon boat in front of the gates while the boat is moving. This boat was running really wide open and there were four little kids sitting on the front of it with their feet dangling in the water.

"If one of those kids would have fallen — hit a bump and fallen into the water — they would have run right over them," he said. "There's no way you could react that quickly and get that motor shut off. People get hurt like that all the time. I don't think they are being malicious. They just don't know."

Osburn said the most common unsafe practice is in the use of life vests.

"There are some considerations about having everyone wear life vests," he said. "I don't care if you have had boating courses or how good a swimmer you are, but everybody should wear a life vest. When I'm on the boat alone, I wear a life vest."

Osburn said he would also like to see more requirements placed on those who drive boats, similar to the requirements on those who drive automobiles.

"Right now, you could go in here and buy a 40-foot yacht and never have been in a boat, but here's the keys and off you go," he said. "You couldn't do that with a car, but we do it with boats. As more and more people are boating, we're seeing more violations and more accidents because people just do not know the rules."

He added alcohol can be a "big factor in accidents."

"One of the downsides of people on the lake is they want to have a good time, they've got some beer onboard, some wine or whatever," Osburn said. "The sun and the heat exacerbates these effects of alcohol, and people get overconfident."

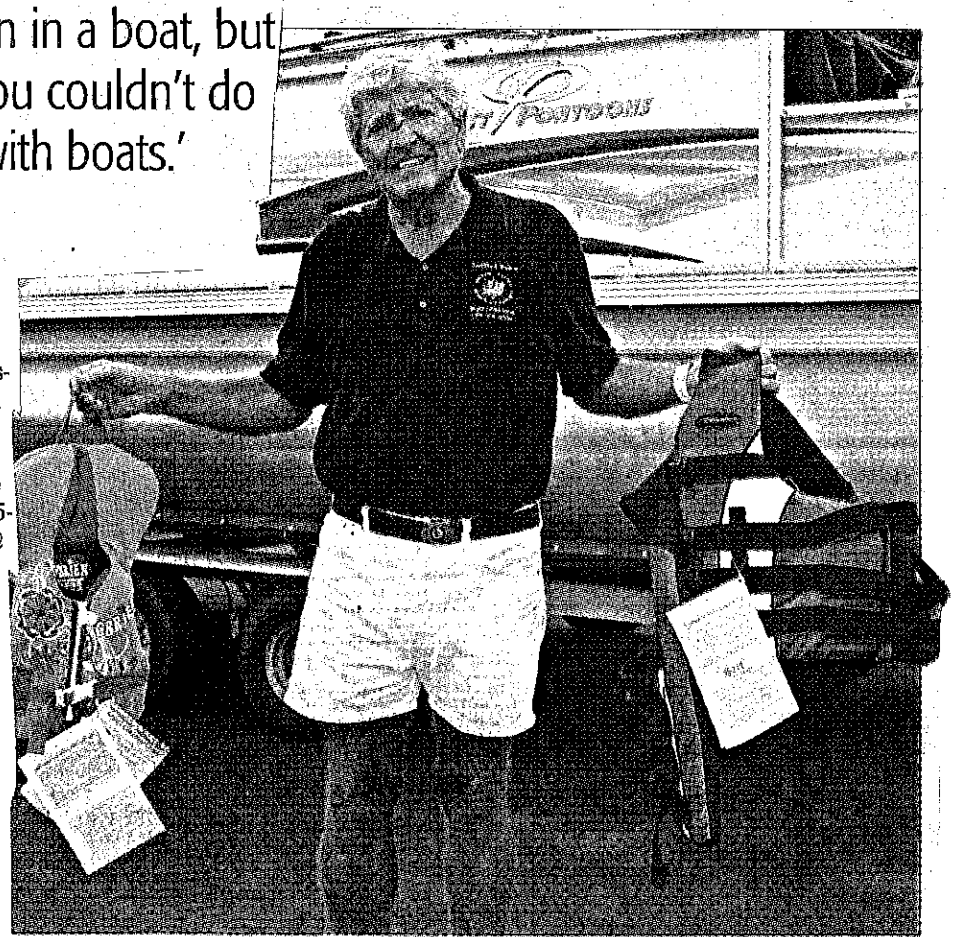
'Right now, you could go in here and buy a 40-foot yacht and never have been in a boat, but here's the keys and off you go. You couldn't do that with a car, but we do it with boats.'

— **Rob Osburn**
Boating safety instructor

The five-week course is free except for the purchase of a $30 manual. It includes instruction on boating rules, safety equipment, lights, anchoring, navigation, trailering and watercraft safety. There is also information on basic prevention, dealing with a fire, exposure to the sun, docking boats and tying knots. Osburn and others will also do on-the-water instruction if students want it and will go on a boat for a safety inspection if requested.

"It's all about the rule of the road — it's very basic," he said. "We talk about the laws as they apply in each state. It's a pretty intense course. There's lots of things in it."

The course begins Tuesday and runs Sept. 18 and 25 and Oct. 2 and 9 from 6:30-8:30 p.m. at Oconee Medical Center. For more information, call (864) 985-0788 or email mjstroven@bellsouth.net.



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Ron Osburn of the Golden Corner Lakes Sail and Power Squadron says life vests are a key component to boating safety.