

Life jacket loaner station unveiled at Mile Creek Park

BY JASON EVANS
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SIX MILE — It didn't take long for visitors to begin using the latest amenity at Mile Creek Park.

Even before Monday's official unveiling of the new life jacket loaner station at the park, boaters and swimmers were borrowing the life jackets to help keep them safe on and in the water on Memorial Day.

Stocked with life jackets ranging in sizes from infant to extra-large adult, the station is available for park visitors to use free of charge.

The station at Mile Creek Park is Pickens

County's first, according to park superintendent Tyler Merck.

"This just showcases the need for this type of program in our area," he said. "They're already being used real heavily today."

The station, located between the park's boat docks, is the result of a partnership between Mile Creek Park, Prisma Health Children's Hospital-Upstate and the boating safety nonprofit Sea Tow Foundation.

"It's a beautiful day to be outside and enjoy the Upstate and all that the Upstate has to offer," said Dr. Scott Sasser, chief clinical officer for Prisma

Mile Creek Park

Health-Upstate's western region. "As an emergency medicine physician,

it's near and dear to my heart that our community be able to enjoy all that

the Upstate has to offer safely."

Sasser said drowning

is a global public health problem.

"In the United States alone, 800 to 1,000 children drown every year, and thousands more visit our nation's emergency departments and hospitals," he said.

Sasser added that more than 40 percent of child drowning victims drown in open water. Sasser said the health system's purpose "extends far beyond the walls of our hospitals and our clinic buildings and into our community."

"We want to be the difference in preventing medical emergencies, and we know that life jackets save

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lives," Sasser said. "We know that they prevent open-water drownings."

Around 70 percent of drowning fatalities occur between May and August, according to DeAndra Reasoner-Winjobi with Safe Kids Upstate, which is a part of the children's hospital's Institute for Community Child Health and Advocacy.

"Life jackets are imperative to saving people's lives," she said.

She said the Sea Tow Foundation has provided life jacket loaner boards across the country, including several in Oconee and Greenville Counties.

"We are very grateful," she said.

Dr. Lorraine Bruce, a pediatrician with Clemson-Seneca Pediatrics, said getting children

used to having a lifejacket on at a young age helps ensure kids will keep using them as they get older.

She added that toddlers can drown in shallow water.

"We just want to make sure that kids are never left alone in the water, especially in lake settings like this," Bruce said. "It's really hard for parents to keep a constant eye on their kids in situations like this, and we want to make sure there are no tragedies."

Merck hopes the first life jacket loaner board "creates a ripple."

"(We hope) that all access points along the water in Pickens County will have one of these installed," he said.

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Officials cut the ribbon on a life jacket loaner station at Mile Creek Park in Six Mile on Monday. Pictured, from left, are Lee Penny, Dr. Scott Sasser, DeAndra Reasoner-Winjobi, Dr. Lorraine Bruce and Tyler Merck.



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Rhys Bramlett, 5, tries on a life jacket at Mile Creek Park on Monday.