

'Good for the soul'



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Paul Boggs of Seneca was among 10 wounded veterans getting on a wakeboard this weekend as part of the Wake for Warriors event on Lake Keowee.

Wounded veterans enjoy wakeboards, camaraderie on Lake Keowee

BY NORM CANNADA
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SENECA — On Friday afternoon, Seneca resident Paul Boggs was out

on Lake Keowee, holding a line from a boat pulling him and the wakeboard he was attempting to ride.

A former U.S. Marine, Boggs, 45, was able to get up on the board and

ride. When he would fall off, he got up to try to go again. After Boggs finished, Ted Hofknecht, took his

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A Wake for Warriors boat pulls wake boarders through areas of Lake Keowee on Friday afternoon. The program is in its second year in Oconee County

place on the board as Boggs put on his blue hoodie, sat down and watched from inside the boat as Hofknächt maneuvered the board through the waves.

CAMARADERIE

The two men are part of 10 (9 men and 1 woman) participating in the second Wake for Warriors event this weekend on Lake Keowee. The program is an effort here and in other areas of the U.S. designed to help wounded veterans enjoy a weekend of fun on the lake while beginning to build relationships and sharing experiences from military service and its impact on their lives with others in similar situations.

"It's fun," Boggs told The Journal describing his morning ride on the board before being the first one to get back on the water Friday afternoon. "(Wake) surfing is just so fun and good for your soul — it kind of washes it."

He also knows the weekend is more than a time to try to stand up on a board in the middle of a lake.

"I like being out here with all the people, the camaraderie with all the people coming to do their thing," Boggs said. "I just love it because it helps to have people

who've gone through things like you have ... With military events like this, it's always cool to see how quickly we just get along, because we've done (military service). Everybody just wants to have a good time. We all mesh really, really quickly."

Boggs said he was encouraged to sign up for Wake for Warriors by Lindsay Herrell, a retired U.S. Air Force staff sergeant, who lives in the area around Lake Keowee, and the only woman participating at the Keowee Key weekend.

Herrell said she originally contacted the leaders of the program to offer to house someone coming or volunteer in some other way. When told they didn't need more volunteers, she responded, "Well, I'm also disabled (veteran). Can I participate?"

She said she enjoyed a new view of the mountains from the water where they were on the lake Friday morning.

"It was my first time seeing that view," she said. "Oh, it was so pretty just enjoying the water, just having a little bit of time to relax was good."

She also liked getting time with other vets.

"Anytime that you can get together with others (military veterans),

that's fantastic to come to engage and relate to each other better and get together. It's really good."

'START WITH HANDSHAKES, END WITH HUGS'

Marty Slone, a retired U.S. Navy commander who owns a home on Lake Keowee, is the leader of this weekend's event. He said the purpose of the weekend is to give these military "heroes" a break from struggles they may have.

"I spent 22 years in the Navy, as an officer, and it's a way for me to give back to people," he said.

"They're doing such great things for our country. They got hurt during their deployments. The military asked them to do great things and they delivered for our country. So, this is an opportunity for us to deliver for them. People say, 'what is success for the weekend for you guys?' Success for me is when we start with handshakes and end with hugs. That's a successful weekend. And we're already hugging right now."

RIDING THE WAKEBOARD

Part of that success is also learning to get up on

a wakeboard.

"I'm very confident in our drivers and our coaches, they are very good at what they do," he said. "One of them's even a professional wakeboard coach ... They're very used to getting people up out of the water — they even got me up. It's a great bunch of people who are proud to be a part of the organization."

Matt Burgess, a medically-retired U.S. army veteran who lives in Columbus, Ga., is participating with Wake for Warriors this weekend, the seventh Wake for War-

riors he has been involved in. Despite his injuries, Burgess said he isn't concerned about riding a wakeboard.

"I'm pretty good in that area," he said.

"It's great to have the camaraderie with all our brothers and sisters in the military and all the people that put us on for this. I have a whole lot of gratitude ..." he added. "It's just the healing of being on the lake and the peace and just to get out and have fun."

PARADE TODAY

A boat parade is scheduled as part of the event at 9 a.m. today. Slone said people are asked to be at Waterford Pointe between 8:30-8:45 a.m.

"We're lining up here at Waterford Pointe beside Amenity Cove," Slone said. "A lot of the neighbors, the folks that have been supporting us, are lining their boats up, and we'll kind of line up and we'll pull out and they're playing 'Born in the USA' and then they'll do the national anthem, and then we'll scoot on out and go from there."

People can watch the parade from their boat on the lake or come down to the docks at the clubhouse at Waterfront Pointe to see the parade.