

Come On in, The Water's Fine

Community-minded water-ski club makes this sport possible for most anybody to enjoy.

By Jim Leuenberger
Shawano County Field Editor

FOR 40 YEARS, the Shawano Ski Sharks water-ski club has performed weekly shows on the Wolf River. They're held Wednesday evenings from June through August, and up to 800 fans attend.

In summer of 2014, the club introduced a program called "adaptive skiing", which allows people with disabilities to experience the joy in this sport.

Club president Dave Passehl learned about adaptive skiing in 2014 and presented the idea to the club's directors. "We unanimously agreed to take the leap," he says.

The club purchased a specially designed ski—allowing a person to glide behind a boat from a seated position with experienced skiers assisting him or her on either side—and demonstrated the device at its shows.

"We wanted to show there's no danger to a disabled skier," Dave says. "It's a chance

for people to try something they might not otherwise experience."

Ski club members met to explain the program with Special Olympics volunteers as well as Community Alternatives, a Shawano support group for disabled individuals. "It was all

about establishing rapport with potential participants," Dave says.

In August 2015, the club held an all-day event to give any disabled person a chance to try waterskiing. Around 15 participated, each getting to ski four or five times.

"It was the coolest thing our club has ever done!" Dave says. "It gave everyone involved a sense of pride."

In 2016, the club again hosted a daylong program, and nearly double the number of participants turned out to give it a try.

Miles of Smiles

"We can't thank the Shawano Ski Sharks enough for this opportunity for disabled people," says Tracy Lasley, residential coordinator for Community Alternatives. "Seeing the smiles once these


HITCHIN' A RIDE. At top, Blaine Andrada (left) and Dave Passehl guide Rick T. on his Wolf River spin. Above, Jenny Onesti and Dave wave to the camera before yelling, "Hit it!"

folks are up skiing is priceless."

Ski Sharks members guide the skiers, pulling them up at the beginning, stabilizing the weight during the ride and helping them ease slowly back into the water as they approach the beach.

More than 50 individuals have participated in the program, and the Ski Sharks now offer the full-day program annually. But, Dave adds, "If disabled people show up at one of our practices, we're always willing to pull them."

"The Ski Sharks are so kind to these skiers," says Julie Miller, director of Community Alternatives. "They go out of their way to make sure it's a positive experience.

"Disabled people have feelings like we all do and just want to be included," Julie continues. "We're a stronger community whenever we can make that happen." 

For information, call Dave Passehl at 715/524-1951 or log on to shawanoskisharks.org.

Shawano

Sideline: Go the extra mile. It's never crowded.