

Volunteers, children enjoy Lions Club picnic

Story and photos by Senior Contributing Writer
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About 150 children enjoyed boat rides, karaoke, friendly horses and ponies, a petting zoo, lunch and more at the Lions Club Kids Picnic, held July 15 at the Buffalo Launch Club.

Craig and Marge Walker, both members of the Buffalo Launch Club, were two of the people who took the children out for boat rides. The boat they used for the children's adventures was loaned to them for the day by Collins Marine. The rides took the children under the south Grand Island bridges and back to the Buffalo Launch Club.

When asked what she enjoyed most about the day's events, Marge said, "It's just seeing them so happy and being able to get out on the water and enjoy a fun event. It just makes you feel good about helping them to do that."

"I think it's the kids," Craig said.

Among the volunteers was a small group of Lions Club members from the Merritton Lions Club in St. Catharines, Ontario.

"We were on the boats, helping the boats," said Keith Brown, a member of the Merritton Lions Club. He said he enjoyed "the boat ride" and "The kids, the way they were enjoying it. They were laughing and being kids. It's great to see."

Matt Aymar, who joined the Merritton Lions Club just a month ago, said, "I liked seeing



Craig and Marge Walker take children and volunteers out for boat rides. • The face-painting tent is busy.

all the kids smiling and having fun. My brother has a daughter with special needs, and I know how challenging life can be sometimes for kids like this. This gives an opportunity for a community to come together. I see so much strength in that. It warms my heart to see it. Those smiling faces, the kids playing together, riding on the boats, experiencing new things that I didn't get to experience as a kid, so that's a beautiful thing.

"The thing that makes me happy is seeing kids in the community being happy with each other and also seeing all the community volunteers. There's probably as many volunteers as there are kids out here. I love that because that shows me this is a strong community. Communities are only as

strong as the people who serve. I'm so heartened by that. It's a great initiation for me into the work that you're doing here, and I hope to be here next year."

Deputy Maryann Landsman, a member of the Mounted Reserve Unit of the Erie County Sheriff's Department, was at the event with her 18-year-old Belgian, Peanut.

Landsman said she was happy "just watching the kids interact with Peanut and making them happy and Peanut happy."

If Peanut were asked what he liked best about the picnic, it was "that he loves the belly scratches and the grass is good. I think he likes being around people. He likes the company, and I think he likes keeping his brain active, and he likes learning new things."



She said Peanut's "favorite treat is cotton candy."

Lions Club President Richard Crawford said the event "was spectacular, as it always is. We have so much dedication from our volunteers, especially the teachers and the staff, the bus drivers who come here and bring these kids for a day that they would normally never see. We are so happy to be able to provide this experience for them.

"The club has been doing it for over 50 years. It might be closer to 60. The Launch Club has been the host for us all that time, and we're so grateful for them allowing us to use the facility and all the wonderful things they do for us."

Crawford also said he liked "seeing the expressions on the

kids when they come off the boat and they're sitting down, having their face painted, when they get up to the karaoke machine and start singing a song. Just their total joy and excitement at being here and experiencing this whole day filled with fun.

"Our thanks go out to all our members, our Merritton Lions Club who comes in and assists us, and the many volunteers from the community who come back year after year after year to assist us. Bob DeGlopper has been cooking hot dogs probably for 30 years. We benefit greatly from our community, by their participation in all our events. We thank the people of Grand Island for their continued support."

Paddles Up Niagara set for Saturday

The 20th annual Paddles Up Niagara, where hundreds of kayaks, canoes and other paddle craft will partake in one of the largest group paddles in the state, is set for Saturday, July 25 (rain date: July 26), at Beaver Island State Park, Shelter 2B.

In addition, to the large group paddle, other activities include: eco-tours highlighting the wildlife and habitat of the Ni-

agara River; learn-to-kayak sessions for anyone ages 12 and over; fishing sessions – no equipment or permits required; free e-bike trial rides; historic and classic boats; plus 20 exhibitors/vendors will sell items or hand out free giveaways, offer demonstrations and provided information about water safety and the environment; a free prize raffle.

This event is organized by Niagara River Greenway Commission, the Town of Grand Island and the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation.

The schedule is as follows:

- ✓ 7, 7:30 and 8 a.m. – eco-tours begin
- ✓ 8 and 8:30 a.m. – learn-to-kayak sessions

- ✓ 8 and 9 a.m. – fishing sessions
 - ✓ 9:30 a.m. until 12:30 p.m. – exhibitor tables, including refreshments
 - ✓ 10-10:15 a.m. – classic/historic boat anchorage
 - ✓ 10:30 a.m. – large group fun paddle
- Cancellations will be posted on the registration website <https://grandislandny.myrec.com> and emailed to registered participants.

Islanders look to win big next weekend

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Leading the Formula R effort is Ayden Sovie of Ogdensburg, who pilots the R-50 CentsLess 15. Powered by a 4-cylinder Ford engine, Sovie enters the weekend sitting second in the Formula R championship standings. The Formula R class regularly reaches speeds approaching 100 mph, setting the stage for close, competitive racing.

Representing the team in Formula F is Grand Island's Ken Brodie III, driver of the F-50 CentsLess 16. In just his second season in the class, Brodie continues to build momentum behind the wheel of his Honda K20-powered hydroplane, currently holding third place in the championship standings. Racing on his home waters, he will be looking to earn his first Formula F victory in front of family, friends and local supporters. Formula F boats race at speeds exceeding 100 mph.

Joining Brodie in Formula F is defending Thunder on the Niagara champion and current points leader "Fast" Eddie Kanfoush of Grand Island. Kanfoush returns aboard the former F-500 CentsLess 17, now known as the F-16 Viper, with hopes of defending his hometown title and extending



Shown at the 2024 event: Racing on the left is GP 50, piloted by Ken Brodie II of the CentsLess team. On the right is GP 35, whose drivers are Brandon and Bobby Kennedy on the TKO Motorsports team. Both hydroplanes raced in the Grand Prix class at Thunder on the Niagara, held at Gratwick Park in North Tonawanda. (File photo by Karen Carr Keefe)

his championship lead. In addition to his Formula F campaign, Kanfoush will also compete in the Hydro 350 class, driving the Quebec-based H-999 La Bête Noire.

In the Hydro 350 division, Joe Less of Buffalo will represent CentsLess Racing in the H-600 CentsLess 12. Powered by a Small Block Chevy V8, the Hydro 350 machines are capable of speeds exceeding 120 mph, and with over 15 entries for the weekend, H350 is sure to be one of the most thrilling classes on the race schedule.

The team's Grand Prix entry features Grand Island veteran

Ken Brodie II in the GP-50 Freedom. Powered by a supercharged Chevy V8, the hometown hydroplane competes in the fastest class of the weekend, where boats can exceed 150 mph in racing conditions. Brodie has captured two race victories across the past two seasons and will be looking to add another win while racing in front of the home crowd on the mighty Niagara River.

Catch all the action Saturday, Aug. 1, through Sunday, Aug. 2, on the Niagara River, where the local teams are ready to bring the thunder.

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