



In trouble? Boone County Water Rescue volunteers will pull you out

By Carrie Whitaker • cwhitaker@enquirer.com • May 27, 2010

Toffee-colored river water lapped against the hull of the custom-made, 30-foot SeaArk docked at Villa Hills Marina on a recent Sunday afternoon.

Temperatures edged toward 90 degrees as four Kentuckians prepared the vessel for the day's work patrolling 95 miles of the Ohio River east to the Kentucky's Bracken County line and west to Big Bone Creek.

Crew member Debbie Winkler untethered the red, white and blue boat as a tree branch the length of a Smart Car floated by on a 3 mph current, triple the river's average speed.

It could be an uneventful day to ride along with the Boone County Water Rescue, Winkler said, because few boaters like to be out in these conditions with debris everywhere.

But if one thing is inevitable, said the group's founder, Capt. Dale Appel, it's the uncertainty of the river.

A barge can hit a drifting boat in any conditions.

"You never know what you're playing with out here," Appel said, standing at the wheel in the air-conditioned cabin, a multitude of navigational devices staring back at him.

•

Last year Boone County Water Rescue made 41 rescues, including two men in the process of drowning and another where 17 people were

unaware the boat they were on was in the way of a barge, what Appel's crew calls "freight trains in the water." They responded to 48 boat incidents, when vessels lost power or ran out of gas – nearly half of which occurred in Campbell County water.

Selected as one of the best public safety dive teams in North America by the International Association of Dive Rescue Specialists, chances are this group will be first on the scene if you're in trouble on the Ohio.

And this highly trained group of 56 volunteers does it for free, operating on a budget last year of roughly \$111,000, less than the City of Mason paid to bring Huey Lewis and the News to play at last year's Red, Rhythm & Boom.

"It probably cost me 30 bucks to come down here today," crew member Michael Bean said. "A lot of people can't understand why we do this."

To the rescue

On an easy day, one can appreciate the perks; riding around on a boat all day, admiring Downtown architecture and Kentucky's rolling hills, waving and honking at cheerful boaters.

You can see why Winkler – a certified paramedic who also works as a media specialist for Covington School District – calls her days on the

Advertisement

USA TODAY
AutoPilot ✈️
 The new travel app for iPhone® and iPod touch®
 Presented by: Hampton
SEE HOW IT WORKS »

Print Powered By FormatDynamics™



river “a getaway from the hustle and bustle of life.”

But these are the same folks who braved tumultuous conditions in March when a tug boat capsized. Waters reached flood stage and the swell drove a speedy 7 mph current.

Two people on the tug boat swam to shore. A third, Christopher McAllister, was not so lucky.

In 1998, when Covington Police Officer Mike Partin fell from the bridge that connects Covington to Cincinnati while pursuing a suspect, crews searched for 48 hours straight, Winkler and Bean said.

“We slept on the boat in two-hour intervals,” Winkler said.

“Sometimes it breaks your heart,” Bean said, remembering a recovery he made of a 6-year-old boy. “But if you don’t do it then family doesn’t get the closure they want and I can’t imagine that feeling.”

More eyes on the river

Appel knows these waters. He points out pits in the river bed, where the water reaches more than 90 feet deep.

Of course, he knows where to fuel up and does so this Sunday as U.S. Coast Guard Lt. Rob Reinhart jumps aboard.

It’s obvious the men have great respect for one another. Dale calls Reinhart “Lieutenant.”

Both men agree that the Ohio River – which in this area mostly belongs to Kentucky – is better patrolled today than ever before.

“In the past there hasn’t been a lot of coordination,” said Reinhart, who oversees the Cincinnati Coast Guard, employing 10 active-duty officers and 24 reservists. “We are sharing information now, putting eyes on the river. If we can do the best job possible, we’ll keep our little part of the river safe.”

It’s not just Boone County and the Coast Guard stepping up in their coordination. Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Indiana Department of Natural Resources, Kentucky Fish and Wildlife and a variety of police departments help with safety and emergency response.

“Dale has the biggest number of assets on the water,” Reinhart said. “He has gone above the call of duty.”

The sad truth is Boone County Water Rescue may have never been created if Appel had not lost a good friend to the river. Out of the respect for his friend’s family, Appel does not identify him.

“A very good friend of mine drowned and was run over by a barge, and all they had was a two-foot dragging bar,” Appel said. “The condition he was found – it should have never happened.”

It was 1967 and Appel was in his 20s. He decided to become a diver and began putting together what today is Boone County Water Rescue. Through the years his trusted team of divers has recovered bodies in Tennessee, Nebraska, Colorado and all over Kentucky.

On this Sunday, the river and those soaking up the sun on it behave. No one needs medical assistance, no one runs out of gas or experiences engine failure, but the crew cringes

Advertisement

Mom Dilemma #36:
Your daughter insists on wearing her princess costume to the grocery store. Allow it or not?

YES, at least she’s dressed!

NO, I have some rules!

momslime.com
where Local moms meet

Print Powered By FormatDynamics™



when they see a man on a jet-ski without a life preserver.

The crew can enjoy a calm day, but they know it's unlikely things will be so quiet this weekend.



[Zoom](#) [Buy This Photo](#)

The Enquirer/Malinda Hartong
Capt. Dale Appel of Boone County Water Rescue radios the Coast Guard as he and his crew pull away from their slip in Villa Hills, Ky. to patrol the Ohio River on a Sunday afternoon.

Obey navigational rules and don't jump waves behind barges or other large boats.

Make sure you have a marine radio, cell phone and signal flag.

Boone County Water Rescue, U.S. Coast Guard



[Zoom](#) [Buy This Photo](#)

The Enquirer/Malinda Hartong

River safety tips

Do a full inspection of fittings, the fuel system, electronic gear, anchor lines and boat trailer.

Inspect your life jackets. Make sure jackets are properly sized and do not have rot or tears in the material.

Check flares, fire extinguishers and first-aid kits. Replace anything that is expired.

Advertisement

Mom Dilemma #36:
Your daughter insists on wearing her princess costume to the grocery store. Allow it or not?

YES, at least she's dressed!

NO, I have some rules!

momlikeme.com
where Local moms meet

Print Powered By FormatDynamics™