

New program hopes to introduce Douglas County children to canoeing

By Emily Kram

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Judy Aspling was in a playful mood Tuesday as she flipped through a catalog at Northwest Outlet in Superior, looking at life jackets.

"Oh, let's get the Barbie ones," Aspling said with a sly smile.

President of the Friends of the St. Croix Headwaters

group, Aspling was among the people charged with selecting equipment to put the final touches on the Canoes on Wheels program to be launched this spring. Her Barbie life jacket idea wasn't a hit, but she thinks the canoe program can be.

Canoes on Wheels (COW) is a program designed to give Douglas County children the opportunity to experience the

lakes and streams around them in a canoe at least once before graduation. A trailer loaded with eight canoes and the necessary paddles and life jackets will be provided to groups free of charge.

"We've seen a lot of enthusiasm from people who realize that their kids have not had this opportunity," Aspling said. "They're so into the motor sports; either that or they can't afford any of that and don't do anything. To not get a little bit of silent sport into them before they're out of school is just wrong. We're going to fix that."

Canoes on Wheels is the brainchild of John Kudlas, who was also in Superior Tuesday to help get the program started. A retired science teacher, Kudlas began a similar program in Rochester, Minn. He is helping the St. Croix Headwaters group reconstruct what he did, right down to getting the canoe trailer from the same manufacturer.

Scott Peterson, executive director of Friends of the St. Croix Headwaters, has worked with Kudlas to try to make sure the program is a success. When it comes to the COW project, the most important partnership for the group will be with the local schools.

"The primary focus would be the schools of students who live in our area, so we're

starting with Solon Springs, Gordon and Wascott — which is down at Northwood School — and the Barnes kids, which is Drummond School," Peterson said. "That was kind of our first focus, and then as our Canoes on Wheels program started going, people said, 'Yeah, but what about other parts of Douglas County?' And so we have expanded it now to 4-H kids and we're going to bring our canoes to a 4-H camp."

In addition to providing canoes and equipment to classes hoping to get out on the water, Peterson said Friends of the St. Croix Headwaters has also set up a companion fund to help with things like paying for a substitute teacher if necessary or diesel fuel for a bus.

"What we're trying to do is run down all of the challenges that might prevent this from happening," Peterson said. He hopes to develop an ongoing relationship with the local schools and wants COW



John Kudlas, left, Scott Peterson, center, and Judy Aspling inspect one of the new canoes to be used by the Canoes on Wheels program Tuesday in Superior. (Emily Kram/ekram@superiorteleg.com)

to be not only a fun experience for children but a learning experience.

On Saturday, Friends of the St. Croix Headwaters will host an educator workshop to instruct teachers to use the equipment properly and to integrate the canoeing experience into their school curriculums. Kudlas will run the workshop, held at the Solon

Springs Community Center from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday. For more information, call Scott at (715) 520-7732 or John at (715) 795-2031.

"We're not stream huggers," Peterson said. "We're interested in what the community feels is important, and one of the things the community really feels is important is the youth of the area."



Scott Peterson, left, and John Kudlas load canoes onto the trailer that will be used by the Canoes on Wheels program this summer. Eight canoes, complete with proper equipment, will be available to area children through the program. (Emily Kram/ekram@superiorteleg.com)

Hoff doing well on latest canoe adventure

The following is a recent segment of Larry Hoff's journal entries as he sets out on a number of adventures for the summer of 2009. Hoff began the Ultimate Hugh Heward Challenge April 17 and is considering three other journeys this summer and fall.

Hoff has earned a reputation for taking on and finishing extreme adventures. He com-

be one closer to the dam. I was wrong. All I found were homes and private property. I was thinking to myself, 'Shucks, I have to turn around and go back.' Nothing bothers me more than backtracking. Just then I spotted a man cleaning up his yard on the other side of the river not far from the dam. I thought, heck it's worth a try, maybe he'll let me cross his