

For an area paddling club, there is nothing better than ...

A day on the water

BY MELANIE BOLTHOUSE
Autumn Guide editor

For seasoned paddlers Lois Goldstein and husband John Heiam, enjoying northern Michigan's waterways in a canoe is like dancing.

"Because we've taken lessons together, we do very well together," Goldstein said. "He doesn't like to dance. But when I'm in a canoe with him, it's like we're doing something together and it looks really good."

Goldstein and Heiam's synchronicity on the water comes from years of experience and the couple's membership in Traverse City's Cherry Capital Paddle America Club.

The club was formed in 1999 by a group of area paddlers who wanted to make connections with other kayaking and canoeing enthusiasts, said Goldstein.

In its first year, the group consisted of about 30 members who hosted 20 outings open to club participants and the public. Now in its sixth year, the group has around 250 members and will lead close to 100 outings this season for members and guests.

People involved in the club range in age from 26 to retirees and cover all skill levels and forms of canoeing and kayaking.

Outings are geared toward the interests of

the group, but non-members are welcome to attend through invitation, said Goldstein, who currently acts as the club's outings director.

"We used to just have it open to the public, but once we started having all these things on the Web, we started having people from downstate cruising our (site) and a lot of people just showing up," Heiam said.

When Heiam and Goldstein began leading outings, they decided to make their trips RSVP only so they knew how many people were interested and if they needed to limit the group's size. The concept caught on and now more than 75 percent of the trips the club offers are RSVP, Goldstein said.

The outings are free to all members who pay a one-time fee of \$35 or \$40 for a couple or family. The price also includes membership in the American Canoe Association.

"What I think is really incredible is a family includes you and anyone else who lives in your house," Goldstein said. "So it's only \$5 more if you have a spouse and a bunch of kids."

With a membership, the people who join become part of a club that not only helps improve paddling skills, but can also become an instant group of friends.

"It's an extremely warm and generous

and friendly group," said club secretary Jocelyn Trepte. "It's a nice opportunity to meet such a cross (section) of people."

To accompany club outings, Goldstein has created a paddle buddies e-mail list so members can get together even when there isn't a set event planned.

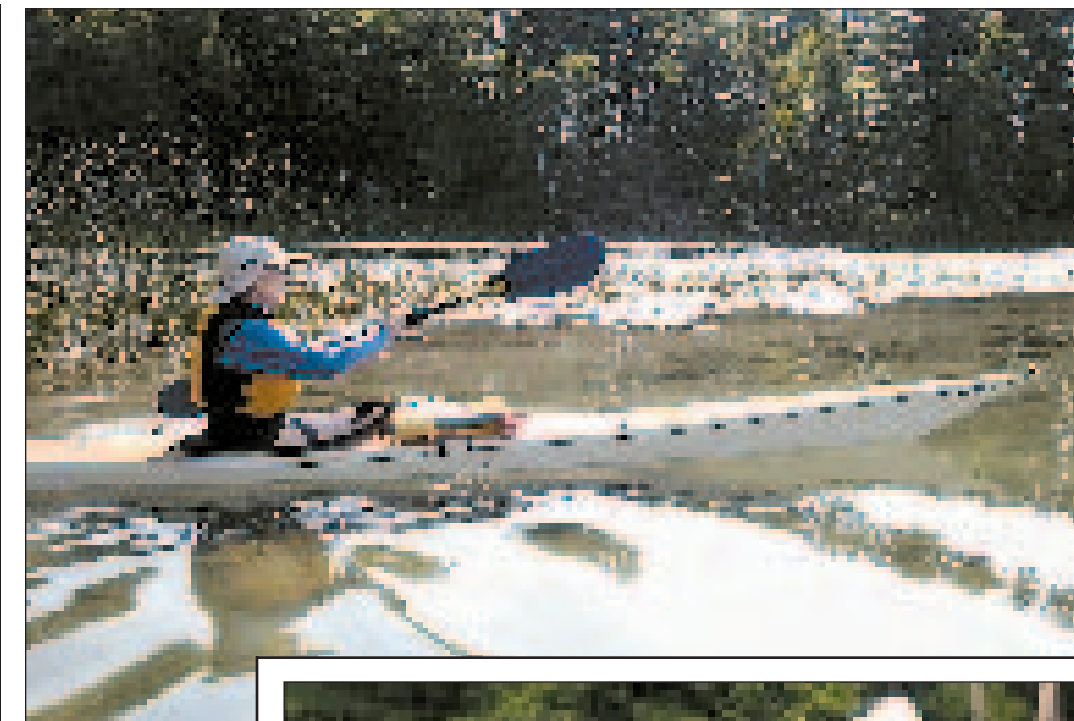
"That happens a lot in these organizations," Heiam said. "You meet other people who like doing the same thing you do, and so there's a lot of spur of the moment things that go on just among people that you meet."

Member Jim Batsakis joined to take advantage of another important benefit.

"After I got a kayak, I had started doing some paddling on my own and quickly realized that once you got in it, there were a lot of things to know," he said. "I immediately realized if I was going to do this right and safely and have fun, I had to take advantage of what they have to offer."

Batsakis participated in one of the many skill-building events the club holds annually and joined right after the first session. In the few years he's been a member, he said he's seen his paddling improve in almost every way, from how he gets in and out of his kayak to how he handles different situations and maneuvers.

"Above all, they stress safety and they take safety and preparation very seriously," Batsakis said.



Record-Eagle/Lara Neel

Clockwise from far left: Jim Batsakis takes photographs before a morning Cherry Capital Paddle America Club group paddle on Arbutus Lake in Traverse City. Marlene Steider checks her paddle as her husband, Dave Steider, walks toward their kayaks. Mary K. Monteith propels her kayak around Arbutus Lake. Mary Bantle leads the pack of paddlers around the lake. Marlene Steider and Judy Albert take a break from paddling to socialize.

