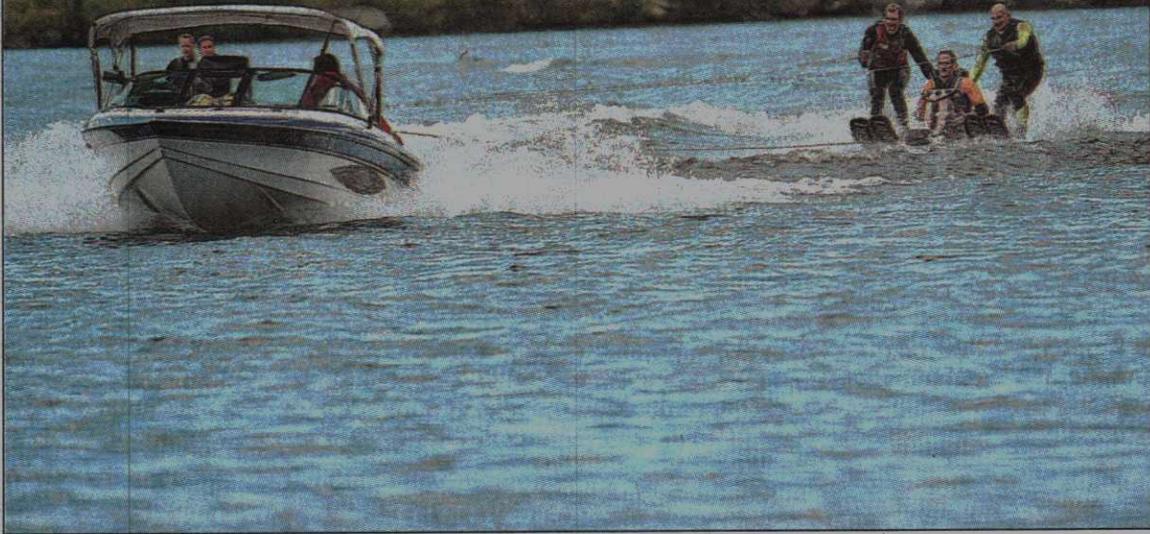


VITALITY IN MOTION



JASON FARMER / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Jason Otto of Fleetville had a “great experience,” he said, after water skiing with Individual Abilities in Motion, a group that helps people with spinal injuries get out and have fun, at Chapman Lake on Sunday. See story, Page A3



JASON FARMER / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Representatives of Individual Abilities in Motion coordinate water skiing at Chapman Lake on Sunday.

GETTING IN ON THE ACTION

People with spinal injuries use adaptive skis to cruise Chapman Lake.

BY SARAH SCINTO
STAFF WRITER

JERMYN — After a couple of laps around Chapman Lake on water skis, Max Malec emerged from the water, smiled broadly and climbed back into his wheelchair.

“Awesome!” the 7-year-old Roaring Brook Twp. resident said. “The water coming up in my face was refreshing.”

Max has spina bifida, but that doesn’t stop him from playing football, basketball and other sports.

On Sunday it didn’t stop him from hopping into a specially designed set of water skis and cruising in the wake of a speedboat, stretching his hands out to touch the water.

Max was one of more than a dozen people who came to Chapman Lake to try adaptive water skiing through the organization Individual Abilities in Motion, which helps people with spinal injuries “get out there and have fun,” President Joe Salva said.



JASON FARMER / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Vikki Hazelwood and Ed Strauss help Jason Otto during takeoff while water skiing with Individual Abilities in Motion at Chapman Lake on Sunday.

“It gets people new experiences,” Mr. Salva, 36, of Olyphant, said. “They see that there’s still some stuff they can do in life, just a little bit differently.”

Mr. Salva helped create Individual Abilities in Motion. Sunday was the group’s second adaptive water-skiing event. He said the group also hosts hand-cycling events and attends comedy shows and baseball games, all to help people with spinal cord injuries

connect with one another.

Newtown, Conn.-based Leaps of Faith Adaptive Skiers provided the adaptive water skis.

Adaptive water skiing provides people an opportunity to exercise, teaches a sport, offers “an exhilarating time on the water,” builds confidence and creates bonds between skiers, Joel Ziesler of Leaps of Faith said.

“For many disabilities, (water skiing) is a great

sport,” Mr. Ziesler said.

First-time skiers used the “training wheels” skis, sitting on a middle board in a metal, cradle-like seat called the cage while two “outrigger” skis helped maintain balance.

Max took the last ride of the day while his father, Mike Malec, 46, of Roaring Brook Twp., watched from the boat, video camera in hand.

“It’s an incredible feeling,” Mr. Malec said, zooming in on Max.

For 30-year-old Holly Petro, her first time water skiing also meant her first time swimming since injuring her spine in a car crash six years ago.

“They let me swim,” the Hanover Twp. resident said. “It was neat to get back in there, to have that freedom again.”

Details on Individual Abilities in Motion are available on Facebook and at www.individualabilities.org.

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