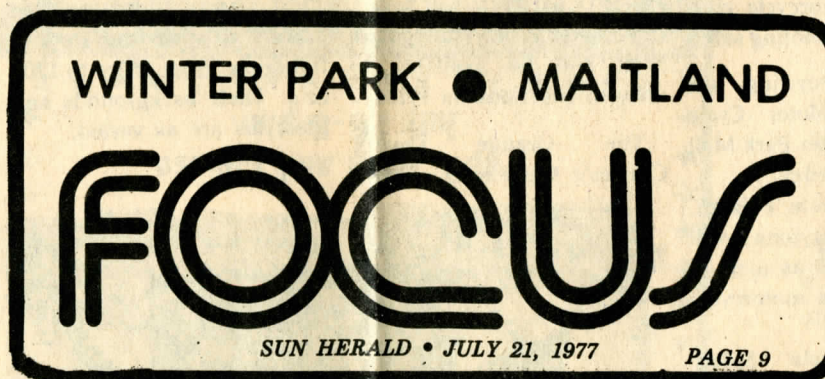




[All photos by Erik Calonius]

Patrolman Windy Wills comes to the assistance of a stranded boater.



More Patrols? Tighter Rules?

A Search For Safer Boating

BY ERIK CALONIUS

ALL BOATS MUST BEAR CURRENT
STATE AND CITY OF WINTER PARK
OR MAITLAND REGISTRATION.
OPERATE AND SKI OUTSIDE OF
100 FT. RESTRICTED AREA BUOYS.
BOATS WILL BE INSPECTED FOR
PROPER SAFETY EQUIPMENT. OB-
SERVE ALL POSTED RULES AND
REGULATIONS. *SAFE BOATING!

PURCHASE CITY
BOAT REGISTRATION
• AT SCENIC BOAT
TOURS - END OF
MORSE BLVD.

In addition to monitoring boat traffic, Wills is constantly alert to thefts. Although there isn't a breakdown of lake crime available, it often involves the theft or vandalism of boats, motors and boathouse equipment. Two weeks ago the police boat itself was burglarized, and a fire extinguisher and flares were stolen. The thief also attempted to pry loose the police radio, but failed.

In this aspect of his work, Wills complains that he often does not receive police reports that concern lakeside crimes and accidents. "It was over 24 hours before I found out that a kid had fallen overboard and had been injured," Wills complained, referring to an accident that occurred on Lake

On the other hand, what about the conscientious boater--say a visitor from out of state--who would like to follow local boating regulations? A call to the Chamber of Commerce would not produce a boating handbook for him because although the chamber carries many materials, the book of boating regulations is not among them.

But the Chamber recommends going to the Scenic Boat Tour stand, where the boater will have to purchase his local registration decal anyway. But at the stand, the boater is frustrated again. Last week, they had "run out" of the booklets.

So the conscientious boater might finally end up at the police station, where, with in a thick packet of

He'd hardly drive through town with his wife and kids dangling from the hood of the car. But get him out in the family powerboat, put a beer in his hand, and - well, why not? Everyone up front. Sure, hang your legs overboard. O.K. everyone hang on!

The boat leaps forward in the water and sunglasses, wallets, beer cans and passengers tumble and cartwheel in response. 20-30-40 mph.

At 45 mph the boat slides into a curve and throws out a wake that tears at the shoreline and nearly tips over two men in a rowboat. But he's got an angry 200 hp engine in this thing, so he might as well open it up all the way. Now point this baby across the lake and let her rip.

This same boat operator may drive with caution on the highway. He may keep within the speed limits and have a clean driving record. But on the lake, none of this training seems to translate into responsible boat operation.

Irresponsible boating on the Winter Park/Maitland lakes seems to stem largely from two kinds of boaters. First, from the boaters who are ignorant of state and local boating regulations, and who haven't taken boating safety courses. Second, from boaters who know the rules, but who figure that there's no one on the lakes to enforce them.

The answer? Many people say that boat operators should learn the rules, possibly through mandatory "road" testing and licensing. Others say that

the lakes need more patrolling by city police officers.

The newly-formed Lake Safety Board, which held its first meeting Tuesday, hopes to check into every facet of the problem and prepare its recommendations by December 31st. The board was formed by the Winter Park City Council last week in response to several serious boating accidents that have occurred recently. But local residents aren't waiting for the board before voicing their own opinions.

"Poor" is how Kyle Riva, Rollins' ski instructor rates the safety of Lake Virginia. "There are always your share of drunken boaters," he noted. "If there was the threat of a policeman, people would observe the rules. That would be the solution to the problem right there."

"Limit their damned beer consumption," suggested Dick Hands, a 9-year veteran boat salesman at Killarney Boat Center on Fairbanks Ave. "It's not the motor itself but the person that causes accidents."

Hands said that boaters must learn to operate their craft safely. "You should never let a new boat owner go without knowing the safety regulations," he said. "If he's a new boat owner I'll take him onto the lake and spend an hour or so showing him what to do. I recommend that they take the Power Squadron or Coast Guard Auxiliary course as soon as they get a new boat."

"More patrols," said Capt. Enoch A. Poulter (RET.), who operates the boat for the Scenic Boat Tour operation. "As soon as they see the patrolman they straighten up and fly right. Of course he'd almost have to work undercover to really crack down. But his presence is a deterrent."

"Lots of people water skiing break the law when there's no patrol out here," added Stan Smith, who runs the Scenic Boat Tours concession on Lake Osceola. "You see it every day. If there's no patrol there, they (the waterskiers) get wild."

"It's just like the highways," Smith observed, "when they see the patrolman they slow down."

Ironically, the one person who hesitates before suggesting more patrols is Windy Wills, who for six years was the area's sole lake patrolman. Wills doubts the effectiveness of a slightly enlarged patrol, noting the sheer impossibility of effectively patrolling the areas 1,000 acres of lakes. "The minute you're not there a little boy could fall out of a boat and drown," he said. And what about a

greatly enlarged lake patrol? "I don't know if the city has that kind of money," he responded. Last week the city did expand the lake patrol from 30 to 48 hours per week, however.

Nevertheless, wherever Wills patrols, it is obvious on the faces of the boaters that he is having an effect.

"I see you don't have a current registration," Wills called out to two fishermen last Saturday, pulling his patrolboat beside them.

The boat's owner stammered through a tale of woe, while Wills slowly circled to the other side of the fishing boat.

"And I see on the other side here that your state registration is expired too," Wills said.

"It's on my dresser at home," the man pleaded. "Really."

Wills reprimanded the man, and told him to get his registrations up to date before bringing out the boat again. Pulling away from the dazed fisherman, Wills explained, "If it's within a month of the expiration date I give them a warning. But if I find him on the lake again without it, I'll crack down."



'If there was the threat of a policeman, people would obey the rules.' - Kyle Riva



'As soon as they see the patrolman they straighten up and fly right.' - Enoch Poulter



'Limit their damned beer consumption.' - Dick Hands

virginia two weeks ago. Rather than extensive patrols, Wills puts more faith in better training for all boaters. "I believe that everyone should have a license to operate a motor over 10 hp," he said. This, he adds, would require the boater to take a written as well as a "road" test. Presently Wills is in charge of issuing licenses to the only operators who by law must have one: youths under the age of 16.

In 6 years Wills has licensed about 580 young boat operators. During the "road" test, he requires that they operate their boats through canals, pull up to a pier from four directions, back into a slip, and go to the middle of the lake and tow the police craft back to shore. Wills is convinced that operators who go through this program are better and more aware boaters for the rest of their lives.

But what about boaters over 16? For them it is merely a filling out of forms and a signing of checks to receive their annual Florida and Winter Park/Maitland boating permits. After this they can drop any size motor into a craft and launch it onto the lake. There is no speed limit at the center of the lakes. And although a boater can be fined for speeding in restricted areas, recklessness, and other violations, the city police are powerless to revoke or suspend his registration. So you could have a boater on the lake who has no conception of the rules and regulations, no idea of how to operate his craft, and possibly no interest in knowing about either.

materials, he would find the local and state boating regulations.

Or he might finally head to Dinky Dock, the public launching ramp, where he would indeed find some of the regulations posted on a sign in bold letters. The remainder of the rules he would find posted behind a sheet of plastic, but condensation on the plastic would make it hard for him to read the print.

So very easily a boater would have trouble in our area hunting down the local boating regulations. Unfortunately, few boaters go to the trouble. "Most of them seem to know the rules already," remarked Stan Smith, who sells the boating stickers. "At least they very seldom ask me about the rules or the book."

Not everyone agrees that the lakes are dangerous, however. Robert Sutley, director of campus safety at Rollins remarked, "I go boating, and the norm on Lake Virginia behind Rollins College is safe. Enoch A. Poulter noted, "You don't see too many close calls. There's plenty of room out there."

Still we have to return to our speeding boatman, racing across Lake Virginia with his family clinging to the bow of the craft. Should he have been made aware of local boating regulations when he purchased his local sticker? And should he have a good chance of running into a city patrol boat in a matter of minutes?

These are the questions that the new Lake Safety Board will certainly be discussing in the coming months.