

Madden shares his love of lakes with tenants from Victorian Heights

By Vicki Browne

Iron County Lakes & Streams Partnership

With flawless collaboration Tom Madden, residents on Stager Lake and staff from Victorian Heights provided a memorable pontoon tour for five lucky tenants from Victorian Heights. The participants had to be selected using a raffle drawing because more than half wanted to go.

Madden, an ICLSP director and property owner on Stager Lake, had the idea last fall. "I wanted to do something nice," said Madden. "Many people don't get to take a boat ride."

Madden connected with Karanda Smith, services coordinator at Victorian Heights and Lindsey Anderson, director of Victorian Heights. Wanting to start small, the plan was for five tenants and two staff members to join Madden and his wife Sylvia on their pontoon boat for a one hour tour of Stager Lake.

Last summer Madden organized a kayak and canoe tour of the lake for ICLSP members to highlight native aquatic plants. Madden used helium balloons to show the locations of ten native plants. "Setting it up was challenging, but we only lost one balloon," said Madden. This summer he wanted to reach out to people who may not have opportunities to be on a lake.

Stager Lake is an artesian-fed lake in Mastodon Township. It is about 112 acres in size and contains three small islands. There is a township park, and the lake is home to a pair of loons. Stager Lake is free of invasive species. Madden checks the boat launch area regularly, and the Lake Association has an aquatic fund for mitigation, if it becomes necessary.

The most impressive part of this event was how thoughtfully each detail was managed. Madden and Joe Rahoi, another resident on the lake, built a gradual set of steps up from the dock to the pontoon, painted it with non-skid paint and temporarily secured it to the dock so no one would have to take a step of more than a few inches to board the pontoon. There were umbrellas if the sun or rain made anyone uncomfortable. There were blankets in case the weather was chilly. Rahoi and his wife Cindy, Dave and Doris Lee, and John Bjork, all residents on the lake, were on hand to help everyone embark and disembark safely.

While on the tour Madden shared lake lore. Locals tell the tale of Sir Francis Stager whose boat was struck by a falling tree and sank to the bottom of the lake. Although this is a very tall and untrue tale, someone added a skeleton to the 'wreckage' to enhance the story. Noteworthy too is the very high dock which was installed especially for all the cruise ships that depart from Stager Lake.

On a more practical note, Madden, who is the Cooperative Lakes Monitoring Program volunteer for the lake, showed participants how to take a water clarity reading with a Secchi disk. Smith took the reading. The lake was clear to 17 feet.

At the end of the tour Smith expressed her delight. "The tour was amazing," she said. "Thank you so much for reaching out and inviting the tenants. Fresh air and reminiscing about their sumtime fun was a real treat."

Madden hopes to take other tenants of Victorian Heights out later this summer. Cindy Rohoi and Doris Lee indicated that they could have additional pontoon boats for the next tour.