

Making a splash

Clinic helps kids discover the thrill of water sports

BY JILL TATGE-ROZELL

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TWIN LAKES — For the Dabrowski family, the best thing about Tuesday's water sports clinic in Twin Lakes for kids with disabilities, was not having to explain anything.

Nathan Dabrowski, 10, who has autism, could be himself. And the family could simply enjoy the time together.

"For the kids and us, it is a chance to do something together with no stares," said Nathan's mother, Sandi. "Nathan doesn't have a disability you can see, and people fail to realize when he has a tantrum or is being impatient it is because he has autism."

Nathan, from Poplar Grove, Ill., was one of more than 50 children who were able to water ski, tube, kayak, canoe, fish and simply enjoy a day at the Lance Park beach through the Dreams For Kids "Extreme Recess" program.

"Some of these kids have never seen a lake," said Tom Tuohy, founder and director of Dreams for Kids. "In some cases our first challenge is getting the parents to believe it's even possible. Our next challenge is getting the kids to leave the water."

In between, Tuohy said, lives are enhanced and even changed.

Nathan could not hide his excitement as he waited for the three-man tube to return to shore.

"I'm going on a tube ride with Dad," he said, pacing in anticipation.

Another boy, Tyler Woodworth, 13, of Lockport, Ill., was all smiles when he climbed off the tube.

"They went pretty fast, but not fast enough for my liking," he said. "I'm one of those daredevil types."

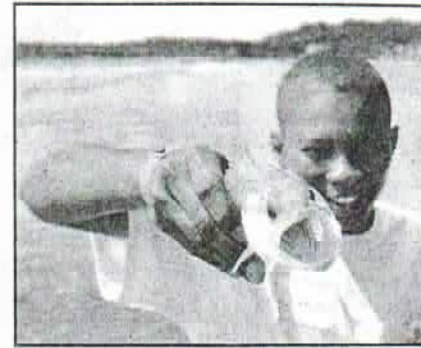
Andy Le, 10, of Barrington, Ill., took it all in.

"I waterskied. I went on a boat. I rode a Jet Ski," he said, listing the activities he had participated in — all before lunch.

His mother Elizabeth said she



ing at Twin Lakes Tuesday. Below: Charles Smith shows off a bass, the first fish he's ever caught.



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Dreams for Kids volunteers, from left, Dan Keneran and Mark Barnes help Ben Spengel get ready for a ride around Lake Mary during the organization's outing at Twin Lakes Tuesday. The group helps kids with disabilities enjoy water sports.

and full of opportunity the day was.

"He loves this kind of stuff," she said. "This is like therapy for him."

Tuohy said the goal of this clinic, and other sports opportunities offered by Dreams for Kids, is to improve the children's quality of life and health and to build confidence and self-esteem.

Dreams for Kids has grown to serve a more diverse group of children since its inception 20 years ago and is now a nationwide program.

"We started in a homeless shelter on the south side of Chicago," Tuohy recalled. "We had a holiday event on Christmas Eve

we consider the first disability to be poverty. To be poor can be extremely challenging."

Dreams for Kids partnered with the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago in 2000 to begin offering adaptive water sports programming for kids.

The Twin Lakes clinic is supported locally by the Aquanut Water Ski Team, which provides volunteers.

Shawn Warner, right, greets Matthew Halemba after a ride around Lake Mary. Warner serves on the board of directors of Dreams for Kids and directed the dock and

