

Paddleboard race series comes to St. Cloud

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They skimmed the surface of Lake George like a well-placed grouping of lily pads, floating easily with each stroke of the paddle. After two hours of instruction and practice, even those Outdoor Endeavors staff members new to stand-up paddleboarding were moving about with ease.

Then someone testing the limits of technical skills fell in, much to the delight of onlookers.

The secret, the group of eight St. Cloud State University students said Thursday afternoon after they came ashore and sprawled on the grass, is in mastering balance with a parallel stance.

"As long as you stay relaxed, you're fine," said Matt Coleman, a senior from Elbow Lake who first tried the sport last fall on Lake Superior. "It was super calm, nice water," he said of Lake George.

Calm waters were a consideration when organizers chose locations for the BIC SUP One Design Challenge, according to Jimmy Blakeney, Massachusetts-based product and marketing manager for BIC Sport. The inaugural series will include four events in St. Cloud, currently the sole Minnesota city on the circuit.

"It's not the board that's going to tip over. It's you," said Nick Goldsmith, a sophomore from Shoreview. Anyone with skateboarding, snowboarding or surfing experience likely would have a shorter learning curve, he said. Control comes in the form of front-to-back weight distribution, security in the form of a leash that attaches board to ankle.

The stability of the boards is part of what makes the sport accessible to a range of ages. Community members can try it out Sunday in the form of friendly competition during the first free St. Cloud event in the River City SUP Series, part of the BIC SUP One Design Challenge.

"We want to get people on boards, we want them to try it out," said Julie Lunning, executive director of the St. Cloud Area Convention & Visitors Bureau. A member of Mississippi Partners' active recreation and tourism committees, she said the event fulfills that organization's aim to develop more events that take place on the river.

Lunning, who tried stand-up paddleboarding for the first time last season on the Mississippi River, said the experience was like walking on water.

"You don't need a lot of skill," Lunning said.

The challenge course will feature heats of six in men's, women's and under-18 divisions.

"Just like a 5K road race, the goal for most people is going to be to come out, have a good time, hang out with their friends and complete the course," Blakeney said.

Blakeney said the series is patterned after BIC Sport's series designed to introduce windsurfing and junior sailing. In St. Cloud, it dovetails with Outdoor Endeavors' mission.

"This is a very fast-growing sport," said Ivan Bartha, coordinator for experiential programs at SCSU's Outdoor Endeavors program. "I think Outdoor Endeavors' role has always been bringing outdoor recreation to the people of St. Cloud."

During the St. Cloud SUP events, Outdoor Endeavors staff will help with registration, deliver safety briefings and track results. They might offer pointers to early arrivals.

The inaugural SUP series has the potential to include 30 international partners sponsoring events in places such as

Puerto Rico, France, Germany and Japan. Many of the U.S. events are concentrated on the East Coast. BIC Sport was founded 30-plus years ago by the family that produces BIC pens.

Try it out

Outdoor Endeavors, which rents stand up paddleboards at St. Cloud State University and at the Lake George boathouse, will offer four sessions of "Quickstart Your SUP," an introductory course focused on stability, technique and safety, from 6-8 p.m. June 17, July 8 and July 22, and from 2-4 p.m. July 20 at the boathouse. Open to eight people 12 and older, the cost is \$25. Find details at www.lakegeorgeboathouse.org.

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Series stops

The River City SUP Series in St. Cloud includes the following:

- * Sunday: 2-5 p.m., Lake George Boathouse.
- * June 29: noon-3 p.m., Lake George Boathouse.
- * July 4: 2-5 p.m., Mississippi River boat launch near Cathedral High School.
- * July 28: 2-5 p.m., Wilson Park.

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Abstract (Document Summary)

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