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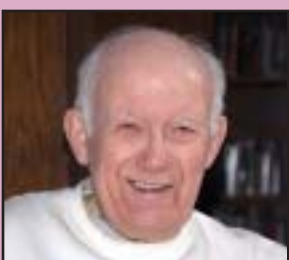
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Urban Boat Builders builds boats, shores up lives of youth

By JAN WILLMS

Tucked away in the Midway area of University Avenue, on the corner of Pascal Street and University Avenue, is a shop that does not fit in with the typical retail stores.

A sign on the door identifies the space as belonging to the Urban Boat Builders, Inc.

Inside are boats, some in the process of being worked on and others that appear ready for launching.

Some young men are putting the finishing touches on these boats as preparation is underway for a launching on Lake Keller, which took place the last weekend in April. Providing instructions is another young man, not much older than his students.

Phil Winger, building instructor and program manager for Urban Boat Builders, is living out his dream, working with youth and building boats.

Urban Boat Builders was incorporated as a nonprofit in 1995 and started its first project in 1996. Winger joined the staff in 2000.

"We have partnered with HIRED, an organization that provides employment training for youth who fit a certain criteria," Winger said.

He said that HIRED ap-



Abdirizak Sharif Nur works on rivets at Urban Boat Builders headquarters. HIRED approached Urban Boat Builders last summer, wanting to partner to do a boat building project for about 10-12 youths. (Photo by Terry Faust)

proached Urban Boat Builders last summer, wanting to partner to do a boat building project for about 10-12 youths.

"Our agency has strengthened its emphasis on youth development," Winger said. "We have sharpened our definition of ourselves as a youth agency."

Winger said that Urban Boat Builders provides the program, the building space, the materials and the instructor. HIRED recruits good candidates.

"These are kids who have not had a lot of opportunities," Winger said. "Some are interested in the trades, others are craving hands-on experience."

Winger said most of the boys are still in high school or working on a GED.

"We started in late November with 10," he said. "We expect a certain attrition rate," he added. "Families move, or some of the guys decide this work isn't for them. This time around, we had a high retention rate until about a month or so before the project ended. I was happy with the level of interest and commitment with this group—it validated our program."

Although their first boat building project last year had one young woman participate, the group this time was all males.

"I would like that to change and become more balanced," Winger said. "It seems like the trades are so male dominated."

Winger, who lives in south Minneapolis, is the only instructor for this project. His path toward becoming a boat builder has been a winding one.

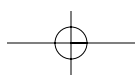
"I grew up canoeing and had a little sailboat in my teens," Winger said, admitting that he liked to sail during thunderstorms. However, his college major was chemistry.

Upon graduation from college, he worked with youth at St. Joseph's Hospital in Minneapolis. "I was really surprised at how much I enjoyed working with kids," Winger said.

During a vacation break at St. Joseph's, he took a boat building class.

"It was one of the best experiences of my life," Winger said. "I remember asking an instructor if I could support a family building wooden boats. He said that depended upon my standard of living. I filed that information away."

CONTINUED ON PAGE 5



Now that early summer-like weather has arrived in Minnesota, playing outdoors is a terrific way for kids to get healthy exercise. Taking a walk around Lake Como, hitting the neighborhood playground, the backyard tire swing or basketball hoop, local recreation facilities and swimming pools and the local beaches are all great for getting kids outdoors and active.

But playing outside comes with many hazards as well. My active little Jonah has new cuts, scrapes, and bruises nearly every day. I was recently reading up on some advice for keeping kids a bit safer outdoors. Here is a little bit of what I found out.

First of all, we all know that too much exposure to the sun can have unhealthy long-term consequences. Just one serious burn raises skin cancer risk. According to the American Academy of Dermatology, even one or two sunburns can significantly increase a child's risk for developing skin cancer later in life. Any child exposed to too much sunlight, regardless of his or her skin color is



New to the Neighborhood

By NATE HAMILTON

Safe fun in the sun

at risk for skin cancer and premature aging. Suggested tips for safe fun in the sun include wearing protective clothing when the sun's rays are the strongest—between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. Parents can also encourage kids to play in shadier spots, and of course use sunscreen and lip balm when appropriate.

Another major outdoors nuisance is bug bites. From mosquitoes and chiggers to bee and wasp stings, each bug bite has its own unique issues and concerns. But with a small amount of prevention and intervention you can keep your kids, skin healthy and your summer fun uninterrupted.

You can eliminate backyard mosquito breeding sites by drain-

ing stagnant water out of cans, pots and yard depressions. Try to keep the lawn mowed and grassy areas cleaned up. You can also check with your local lawn and garden center for kid-safe, environmentally friendly insect treatments for your lawn.

From a preventative vantage, always apply an insect repellent before going outdoors. Studies have shown that DEET is by far the most effective mosquito repellent. Your children should also avoid wearing fragrances, scented sunscreens and lotions and bright colored clothing. Upon your return indoors from a long day of playing, it is always a good idea to take a nice bath and change into fresh clothes.

But once the discomfort from a bug bite has begun, it is time to rely upon antihistamines to provide itch relief for your little one and to help reduce inflammation. With any type of abrasion, there may be the risk of an infection. Keep all open wounds clean and use an antibacterial ointment. And don't scratch! Apply a topical relief instead. Ice or cold compresses can help reduce the swelling and pain.

Leaves of three—let them be! You've probably heard that little rhyme about poison ivy, the plant that can cause an itchy rash. Look out for those poison plants! These plants can be anywhere—from the woods, around the lake path, to your own backyard. The green

leaves of poison plants blend right in with other plants and brush, so it is possible for an unsuspecting small fry to sit right down in a patch of poison ivy and not even notice. You will notice later, of course, when they start to itch!

The allergic reaction caused by poison ivy or poison oak causes rash and sometimes swelling. Not everyone will get a reaction, but most people will. The reaction can appear within hours of touching the plant or as many as several days later. It's itchy, too and it usually takes 1 to 2 weeks to heal. Cool showers and calamine lotion are the best treatments for these reactions.

Hopefully with these outdoor tips in mind, you can have a healthy spring and summer. Please note that I am not a physician (although I am married to an immunologist!) Always consult your doctor for more informed (and intelligent) medical advice.

(Nate Hamilton is a stay at home dad living in the Lake Como area. Contact Nate at nate@mdah.org)

Boat Builders

Continued from page 1

Winger moved to Seattle and worked in chemical research. "It was interesting, but I realized it was not a good fit for me," he said.

In 1998, he heard about the Urban Boat Builders organization. "I couldn't believe a place like this existed," he said.

Winger quit his job and volunteered at a maritime museum, the Center for Wooden Boats on Lake Union in Washington. The museum had a fleet of wooden boats.

Winger knew he had found his calling. He applied for Northwestern School of Wooden Boat Building in the Seattle area and completed a nine-month associate degree.

unteers who were out in safety boats.

Winger said that as well as working with the youth provided by HIRED, some youth are hired out of the Urban Boat Builders' budget to gain employment experience in the shop.

"A number of boys are from Boys Totem Town," he said. "Some participants were incarcerated, and when they got out, they have worked building boats."

The location on the Midway is the only shop space. Winger said Urban Boat Builders does 50 per cent of its work in the shop, 50 per cent as satellite work.

"I take my little hatchback and drive to various schools, such as Totem Town," Winger said.

He said the boys would come in to work on the boats at least three times a week. The shop would be open Mondays and Wednesdays from 3-6 pm, and if the boys attended those three-

boat building, hung throughout the workroom and office. With each picture, he has put a quote by a well-known person, such as Einstein or Booker T. Washington.

"Because you have a product that is so functional, like a boat, you have to learn about teamwork, craftsmanship and perseverance," Winger said. "Those characteristics just develop."

"I feel very lucky to have found this job," he added. "It's such a great fit."

One of the boat-building students, Abdirizak Nur of Somalia, would agree.

"Phil is such a good teacher,

and he has taught me so much," Nur said. "I really appreciate HIRED and Phil giving me this opportunity to learn and build a boat."

Nur, who has been in the United States for seven years, put in excessive hours working on boats, according to Winger.

He has been attending classes at the HUB Center and would come in after school every chance he could.

"I have put in a lot of time," Nur said, "and I learned so much about miscellaneous tools and different types of wood, like cedar wood and cherry wood. I used the

press drill, the band saw and the Japanese saw. We built the whole boat, beginning to end."

Nur said he was given a certificate for 144 hours as a participant in boat building. He said it was also a good way to learn more English.

Nur continues with school and also is working part-time at Goodwill in Roseville, but he considers himself able to build a boat now.

"In the United States, there is an opportunity to learn," he said. "And probably, in the future, I can use my knowledge about building boats."

"These are kids who have not had a lot of opportunities."

- Urban Boatbuilders program manager Phil Winger

"It was pretty intensive, but I really loved the work. The instructors were perhaps the most skilled teachers I ever had," Winger said.

He began pestering Urban Boat Builders with letters.

"I told them I had experience working with youth, and I wanted to do boat building. I started building a rowboat of my own," Winger said. "At the same time, Urban Boat Builders needed a part-time instructor. That turned into a full-time position."

Winger said that this project, which started last November, culminated in a boat launch April 29 at Lake Keller in St. Paul.

The boys built a canoe and a rowboat. They also have restored a boat that was re-launched. They have also been working on kayaks.

The five boys who took part in the launch brought friends and family to the event, as well as vol-

unteer shifts they were eligible to stay Wednesday nights until about 9:30 p.m.

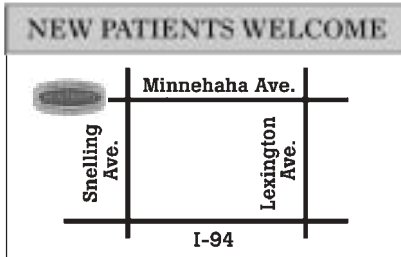
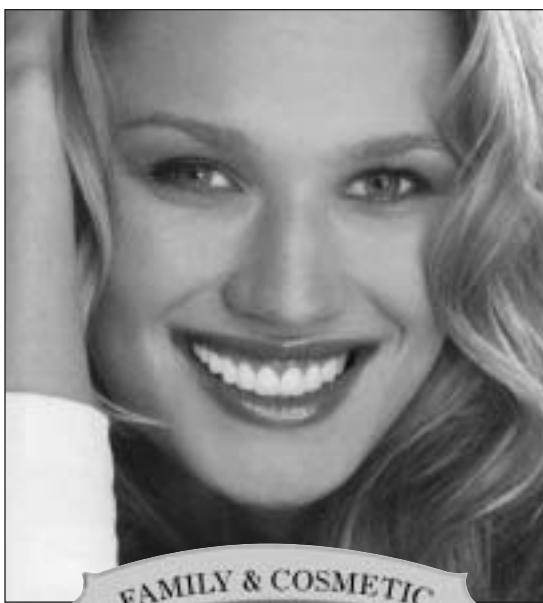
"We opened the shop Wednesday nights, and the boys would overlap with adult volunteers," Winger said. "It would work so well. The volunteers like what we do and like boat building. The kids like meeting new adults."

He said the boys did not need to have had previous building classes, but needed to demonstrate that they were comfortable with hand tools before starting to work on the creation of a boat.

"It doesn't take long before we start," Winger said. "This is a recognized medium for youth development. It makes it so easy for them to develop a number of different traits," he added.

Winger has several photos of his students, working on the art of

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