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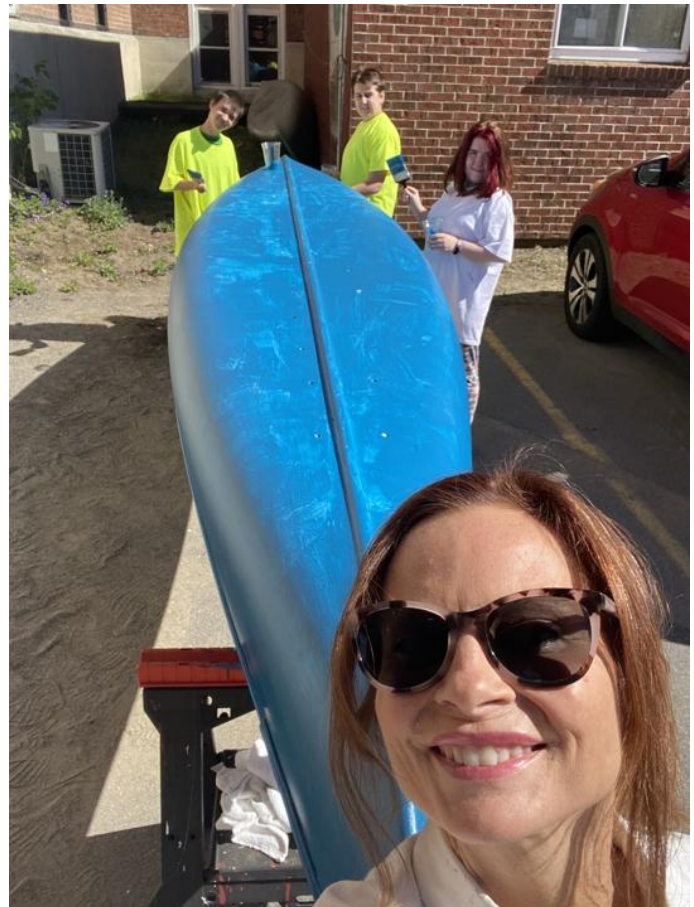
Old boats get new life at Moreau Lake State Park

DAVID BLOW Special to The Post-Star

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MOREAU — A group of area kids recently gave new meaning to repurposing — transforming seven old canoes and one rowboat into artistic planters with important messages at Moreau Lake State Park.

The origin of the Canoe Planter Trail started with some March spring cleaning of the park and the discovery by new park Manager Alan LaFountain of a bunch of old boats.



Fort Edward High School Life Skills class teacher Ann Lilac takes a selfie with members of her class working on their canoe, which would later feature their handprints and signify working together.

Provided photo



A canoe painted by students from Fort Edward High School is blossoming near the beach at Moreau Lake State Park.

David Blow, Special to The Post-Star

Rather than discard the no-longer-usable canoes and rowboat, LaFountain asked members of the nonprofit Friends of Moreau Lake State Park if they might want them as flower planters.

The group liked the idea, and Friends Vice President Paula Lomasney began assembling student groups to decorate them before the planting started, LaFountain said. Stewart's Shops provided \$2,000 for paint supplies and the effort got underway.



A map of the Canoe Planter Trail at Moreau Lake State Park.

Provided image

Then, group President Mary Knutson and member Marcia Martin wanted to take it a step further and create a new walking trail with the painted boats as markers along the way, LaFountain said.

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He was amazed that by early June, the boats were done and ready for flowers and vegetables, which on Friday were blooming away and bearing veggies.

Asked about his initial thoughts when seeing the students' artwork, he said, "We have some talented, talented people out there artistically."



Students from Saratoga Springs High School pose with their canoe, which now greets visitors at the entrance of Moreau Lake State Park.

Provided photo

The eight groups represented Fort Edward High School, Fort Edward High School's Life Skills class, Saratoga Springs High School, St. Mary's-St. Alphonsus School, United Sisters of NY in Albany, two Scout troops from Wilton and The Bulldog Zone from Moreau Community Center.

"It's all about inclusivity and protecting our Earth," Lomasney said, adding that the kids were told to keep those themes in mind when creating.

At the entrance to the park is an intricately painted canoe by the Saratoga students featuring several nature scenes, a symbolic rainbow, colorful flowers — and a squirrel and rabbit enjoying large ice cream cones.

“As soon as we saw it we knew it was the centerpiece,” Lomasney said.

Other canoes along the 2.2-mile trail that primarily follows the park access road had similar themes. The Bulldog Zone canoe stressed kindness featuring bees and a “Bee Kind” message.



Friends of Moreau Lake State Park President Mary Knutson surveys the plants in a canoe painted by students from the Moreau Community Center Bulldog Zone.

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St. Mary's-St. Alphonsus School student Thomas Patterson poses in front of the canoe he and his classmates painted.

Provided photo

The St. Mary's-St. Alphonsus boat had a winter scene on one side and summer scene on the other and focused on conservation. And the Fort Edward Life Skills class boat featured student handprints and a recycling symbol, symbolizing the need to work together to improve the earth.

Fort Edward special education teacher Ann Lilac said her students love hands-on lessons like this — and loved it even more when they began seeing their work online.

“They were like, ‘Oh my gosh, we’re on the internet,’” Lilac said of the various sites and Facebook pages touting their work.

Rachel Patrick, a 12-year-old from Wilton, led the effort with fellow Scout Christian Thibeault of Scout Troop 4024 to paint the lone rowboat.

“It makes me feel accomplished. I feel happy I was able to make something that helps and looks pretty,” she said of the boat that features a large sun and birds and mountains.

Troop members all signed their names on the back of the boat.

Lomasney and Friends President Mary Knutson proudly toured the trail with a reporter Friday, pointing out all of the boats and talking about the flowers and vegetables the group planted in there. They said some of the vegetables even feed the turtles in the park’s nature center near the beach.

They also talked about how active the 150-member Friends of Moreau Lake State Park group is and touted its accomplishments.

“We just love this park and we work really well together and complement each other with strengths and weaknesses,” said Knutson, who lives in Saratoga, when asked why they do it. “We come up with these ideas and we find ways to make them happen.”

They have tackled everything from rain gardens to soak up runoff before it hits the lake to building new canoe racks.

And their efforts aren't going unnoticed.

"It's like the park has 300 people working there," LaFountain said. "They're all volunteer and they're awesome."

In addition to the new artistic canoe trail, an Eagle Scout from Wilton named Dana Schmid is building an all-access fishing pier on the Back Pond area of the lake that's nearly completed and accessible from a new parking area and trail, funded by a \$50,000 state grant.

The rain garden was funded through a \$25,000 grant secured by state Assemblywoman Carrie Woerner, D-Round Lake, a big fan of the park.

LaFountain said work has also begun on a new 800-acre parcel of land donated by Finch Paper off Butler Road that will house trails for hiking, biking and skiing in the winter and will be 80% accessible to all.

"The legacy I want to leave on Moreau Lake State Park is to make it more accessible," he said.

On June 26, some of the student artists came to the park to see how their creations were assembled along the trail and met Friends of Moreau Lake State park members.

"They were like so excited to talk about what their ideas were and to just be listened to," said Ann Donnelly, who handles public relations duties for the Friends of Moreau Lake State Park. "It was like a cross-generation thing and the Friends group members loved all the stories.

"I've worked on a lot of committees over the years and this was one of the best groups. Everyone was so selfless," she said.

Knutson said she was at the park one day and a fourth grader from St. Mary's-St. Alphonsus School, Thomas Patterson, was gushing to his parents, grandparents and siblings as he pointed to the work he did on the canoe that featured a summer scene on one side and winter scene on the other.

“This is the part I painted,” she recalled him saying his excitement.

Lilac said she’s meeting two of her Life Skills students who are camping at the park next week to check out where their canoe is located. She said she loved the theme of their canoe and the symbolism of her students’ handprints.



A canoe painted by students from Saratoga Springs High School greets visitors at the entrance to Moreau Lake State Park.

Provided photo

“The handprints symbolize us working together and you have to start with your own community,” she said.