

Charlotte Sun



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Jimmy Carter inspired cancer bill

Georgia lawmakers have approved a bill that prevents insurance companies from limiting coverage of drugs for stage 4 cancer patients.

Sorry, no kangaroos: Service-animal impostors face crackdown



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SUN PHOTO BY RUSTY PRAY

Yaneese Evans, 8, catches the breeze while cruising Charlotte Harbor.

Yacht club provides children with rides of their lives

By RUSTY PRAY
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CHARLOTTE HARBOR — The ABSeas was nicely making way, cruising across the water at a crisp clip.

Seven people were on board. It was one of those mornings made for basking in the sun or cutting a wake on the water. At the moment, the captain was Deniyah Cruz. She's 8, and she'd never driven a 45-foot Saber before, so the wake was a bit of a snake.

No worries. Deniyah and Bob Singer, the boat's owner, had everything under

control.

"This is fun," the Sallie Jones third-grader said.

She would repeat that more than once.

Deniyah and Singer were part of a weekend event called Kids on the Water. Sponsored by the Burnt Store-Platinum Point Yacht Club Charitable Boating Foundation, it gave 20 kids ages 8-15 from the Punta Gorda-based Make it Count Sports a chance to experience boating — most for the first time.

The kids went out on either a power

boat or a sailboat in the morning — a total of six were used — returned to the marina for lunch, then switched types of boats for the afternoon sail.

This was the second such undertaking for the foundation, first for Make it Count Sports, an after-school program founded by Operation Cooper Street director Elgin Hicks in October. Make it Count Sports combines school studies with sports and exercise for children in the Charlotte County School system.

Hicks is looking for people to lend a hand — "donations, sponsors,

KIDS

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volunteers, ideas, grant writers, anybody willing to help." He can be contacted at makeitcountsports@gmail.com.

The program has 300 kids involved in flag football, two traveling girls basketball teams, and many other less organized activities.

"It's rocking now," Hicks said before heading out onto the water. The prospect brought out the kid in him. "This is something different. These kids have never been on a sailboat before. I've never been on a sailboat before. I'm so excited."

The foundation "just wants to give back to the community," said Bill Southworth, co-chairman of the event.

Back on board Singer's brand new — he bought

it last June — spic-and-span, state-of-the-art cruiser, there were three things that most interested the three girls: the helm, the horn and the radio. Denay Cruz, an 11-year-old fifth-grader at Sallie Jones and Deniyah's sister, and little Yaneese Evans, 8, their cousin, took turns steering the boat, sounding the horn and making radio contact with their friends.

"He's giving them the time of their lives," said Rose Larson, a chaperon.

The kids had questions for Singer. Lots of them.

"Can I drive?"

"Yes," Singer answered each time he was asked, always keeping a protective hand close to the wheel.

"Do you have a gas pedal or something on this?"

"Can this go faster?"

"Do you have cable?"

Their reaction to the horn, which was loud

and no-nonsense? "Do it again."

Singer, 68, has a 2-year-old granddaughter of his own. He seemed to enjoy the 90-minute trip as much as the kids.

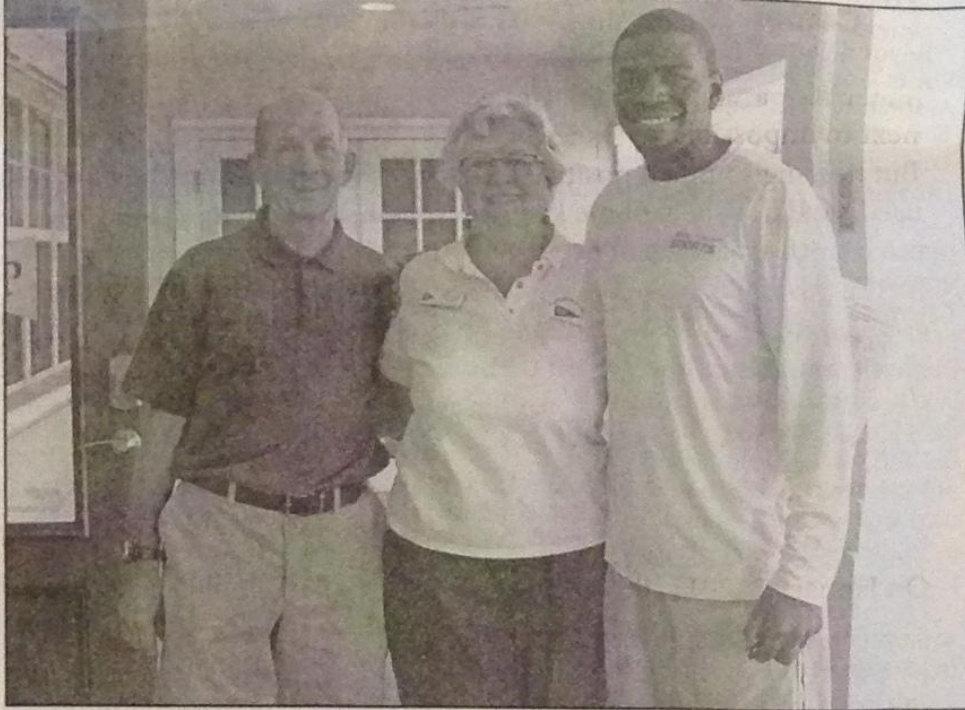
"They'll go back and have something to tell their friends and family," said the retired business executive. "Seeing kids getting on the boat and actually driving, hitting the horn and radio, it's very satisfying."

"You might talk to them in 10 years and this will still be their only experience on boats."

Denay, the 11-year-old, was unsure when she was standing on the dock, waiting to board the ABSeas. "I'm a little afraid," she said. "I'm not a water person."

Halfway through the cruise, she didn't speak out loud. She just mouthed the words, "I love it."





SUN PHOTOS BY RUSTY PRAY

From left, foundation co-chairs Bill Southworth and Carole Lick, and Elgin Hicks, executive director of Make it Count Sports.



The yacht club's Bill Dorrance gives the group the ins and outs of sailing before the members head out to the water.