

(Letter to Wichita Eagle from KCKA President)

June 13, 2005

I want to congratulate the members of the Kansas Canoe and Kayak Association for their actions during the recent rescue of the inner-tuber who was caught under the 21st Street bridge over the Arkansas River. Their actions were a small part of a well executed and safe rescue by the Wichita Fire Department.

Paddle sports are some of the most popular outdoor activities in the nation. A 2003 National Survey of Recreation and Environment found that of the 76.1 million Americans who operated some kind of boat, 51.8 million were paddlers. A recent Outdoor Industry Foundation report estimated that in 2002, 181,146 Kansans over the age of 16 paddled a canoe or kayak at least once. These are impressive numbers.

However, the growth in popularity of the sport brings challenges to our attention. It appears that the simplicity of design that characterizes a canoe or kayak is often misinterpreted as being simple to operate or inherently safe. There is a tremendous need for public awareness of the skills required and the hazards involved in the sport of paddling.

The members of the Kansas Canoe and Kayak Association have been in the forefront of boater safety and education for more than 30 years. Other groups, such as the American Red Cross offer basic canoe and kayak instruction at reasonable costs. Anyone interested in paddling should take advantage of what they have to offer. Their efforts will allow you to learn to boat safely and responsibly.

Paddling a watercraft is an enjoyable, safe activity if the participant follows a few basic rules. First, always wear your safety equipment- including a properly fitted personal flotation device (PFD). Second, be skilled in the craft you are operating and know its intended use. Third, be knowledgeable of the environment and hazards of the area where you are paddling.

Doing so will minimize your risk and maximize your enjoyment of your paddling experience.

James W. Johnson. President
Kansas Canoe and Kayak Association

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