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Show will return to Strawberry Festival

Sunday, June 10, 2007

BY SETH GORDON
 News Staff Reporter

Because their facility is tucked away in the far western end of Belleville Lake, most people don't get a chance to see members of the Belleville Lake Water Ski Club practice on its slalom course or ski jump.

Most years, that changes during the National Strawberry Festival, when the club puts on a free show just off the shore of Horizon Park on the western edge of town. This year's festival runs Friday through Sunday and the water ski club will perform at 3 p.m. Saturday.

"Our site on the lake is considered to be the best public water ski site, not only in the state, but in the Midwest," said past-president and show co-director Justin Juriga. "It's a very protected area from both traffic and wind so that any time of the day you can pretty much enjoy flat water."

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The ski show is one of the ways the club says thank you to the community for the use of the facility. The club also runs a polar bear ski event to raise money for the Girlstown Foundation of Michigan and hosts free ski clinics.

"Our club tries to have a presence in the community to give something back," club president Frank Brown said. "We all appreciate the sport and just want to share it and our love of the water."

The show, which is coming off a one-year hiatus, is a big crowd-pleaser at the festival and features barefoot water skiing, wakeboarding, trick skiing and the two most popular acts, ski jumping and the human pyramid.

"It's a lot of fun, but it's harrowing," Brown said of the human pyramid. "We have a lot of experienced skiers and it's one thing to ski by yourself, it's another if you have people standing on your shoulders. It's definitely something that you don't see everyday."

Although the club puts the show on almost every year, that is not its main focus. The club has provided the training ground for a handful of national and international champions, as well as several state champions.

"On one side, it's a very competitive group," Juriga said. "On the other side of it, there are age groups from 3-year-olds just learning how to ski all the way up to a 72-year-old woman who's been with our club forever. The talent levels are everywhere in between."

The club spends several months preparing for the show at the Strawberry Festival, which requires moving much of the facility down the lake toward town. But no matter how much work it takes, putting on the show is just another chance for club members to do what they love.

"It's very enjoyable to be a part of the show," Brown said. "You build up a camaraderie with

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the people that you ski with, and part of that is skiing in those adverse conditions during practice. You're out there freezing and shivering together, taking those spills. Then there's the satisfaction of once you've learned it, you get out there and perform for the crowd."

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