



Members of the Selkirk Canoe Kayak Centre

Navigating the slough, and life, at Selkirk Canoe Kayak Centre

The Selkirk Canoe Kayak Centre is nestled away in Selkirk Park, past the skateboarders and the picnic area on the banks of the slough.

The waters are calm, nature surrounds you and it's a place that Danielle Gagnon calls a "hub of good".

A member of the Canoe Kayak Centre board, Gagnon says no matter your age, the benefits of getting out on the water and paddling are many.

"As an adult, there's team and camaraderie, there's new friendships, and honestly, whatever stresses you have going on you kind of leave them behind," Gagnon said.

“You get a good workout, you get some laughs. There’s a whole mental health element, it’s unspoken, but you feel it. You want to come back.”

The Selkirk & District Community Foundation provided a grant to the Centre that allowed it to purchase two new kayaks, a swift and a para kayak, that both can be used by everyone from kids and beginners to experienced, competitive paddlers.

Foundation Chair Deborah Vitt says the Centre has been around for more than 30 years and has had an impact on the community.

“It’s sort of a hidden jewel in Selkirk,” Vitt says.

“Thirty years is a long time, and there have been countless kids who have spent their summers down in the slough, learning how to be safe on the water, learning how to be part of a team, and learning that if they keep trying, they will succeed. It’s a fantastic place.”



Board member Rob Wynnobel says the club has impacted plenty of lives and expanding to include para paddlers makes sense.

“We got these boats because in the near future we want to start a para program. There’s calm water here, there’s no current, there’s no boat traffic,” Wynnobel said.

“There’s not many (para) programs around here. If you go east there is, and there’s clubs that paddle four days a week with para people. That’s something we want to do here.”

In the meantime, the boats are perfect for new learners.

The Centre runs summer camps during the day, and competitive and dragon boats in the evening. In fact, members are at the Centre usually six days a week, either involved in programs or doing maintenance to the boats.

Kids come to the Centre in many different ways, some come through Youth for Christ, some from Huddle, and some just show up because they’re interested. A group of about six kids were out paddling on a Tuesday night in July and some had already been in races – with one picking up a bronze medal and another collecting two gold.

Once they experience racing, there’s no turning back.

“They love it, they’re crazy about it,” Wynnobel said.

Gagnon says it’s a sport that gets the whole family involved. Parents don’t just drop kids off, they help out and often end up in a kayak as well.

“It’s not a sport where you bring your kids and sit on the sidelines and watch, families can participate too. Parents can be in the boat, they can come and do it just for fun, it doesn’t have to be all about racing,” Gagnon said.

Joe Penman brought his son Levi to the Centre, and now he’s in a kayak and his wife Jenn is dragon boating.

“I wish I had started this years ago,” he said.

And the kids learn plenty out on the water. Wynnobel says they learn self-discipline, determination and, perhaps most important, they learn how to lose.

“You learn more from losing than winning,” he says.

They also experience nature up close.

A Blue Heron flies by several times a day, there’s eagles and deer, and a beaver dam part way down the slough provides frequent entertainment.

“About 8:30 the beavers come out and they’re swimming all over here. It’s just a great place to be,” Wynnobel said.

Lessons learned at the Centre stay with the kids throughout their lives. A former paddler stopped in recently for a visit and was surprised to see his mentor – Rob’s wife Bonny Wynnobel – still teaching kids.

“One of our teams we had was Indigenous kids from the north of Selkirk, and one of them came this year to see us and was surprised Bonny was still here because he paddled 30 years ago,” Wynnobel said.

He went on to work in retail, and became a manager at a Canadian Tire store in British Columbia.

“He said to Bonny, ‘paddling made the difference in my life’. If you can hear that from one kid, it’s a huge success.”

The Foundation will begin accepting grant applications on Sept. 1. For more information go to sdcf.ca.