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Watersports on Placid

Story By Casey Ryan Vock
Photos Provided by ADK Aquatics

The High Peaks region is known to offer some of the most stunning vantage points to appreciate the awe-inspiring Adirondack Mountains. But Wes Canning of ADK Aquatics is convinced that there's no better place to take in the beauty of the region than on the waters of Lake Placid itself.

The High Peaks region is known to offer some of the most stunning vantage points to appreciate the awe-inspiring Adirondack Mountains. But Wes Canning is convinced that there's no better place to take in the beauty of the region than on the waters of Lake Placid itself.

The owner of Lake Placid-based ADK Aquatics, Canning has for 15 years been striving to make various forms of watersports accessible and enjoyable for just about anyone, whether its thrill-seeking groups of friends or families looking for a memorable way to spend a day.



"That's what's cool about the different aspects of sports on the lake, is that there's something for everybody," says Canning, who — in addition to owning the business — serves as a boat captain and a lead instructor.

He officially launched ADK Aquatics in 2011, but it was born a year earlier almost by chance. Since then, it's become Lake Placid's go-to for instruction on water skiing, wake boarding, wake surfing and tubing, and it offers excursions planned around any combination of these increasingly popular watersports. ADK Aquatics also presents the chance to enjoy each watersports option by way of a full-day group outing, and Canning and his staff host private boat tours, as well.

While each towed activity bears a varying degree of difficulty, with skiing being the most challenging and tubing the least strenuous and perfect for beginners, all the options provide exhilaration, refreshment and the chance to see the Adirondacks and some of its most legendary peaks like never before.

"The bodies of water up here are unique because the wilderness is so beautiful and untouched," Canning says. "We're smack in the heart of the Adirondack Park, so there's a lot of shoreline that's not even developed. [...] Then there's the water and its cleanliness; it's spring-fed, [and] it's the town's drinking water. Not many places can say that."

As its name suggests, Lake Placid features a surface ideal to learning and honing watersports skills. Bisected by the trio of Buck, Moose and Hawk islands, the natural formation of the lake eases or blocks winds, helping to keep waters calm and

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ensuring a favorable situation for those who want to learn how to ski, board, surf or tube.

"We're the only outfit around that will take you out and teach you," says Canning, whose experience and track record make ADK Aquatics a standalone business in the High Peaks and across the rest of the Adirondacks.

However, as he points out, guests are encouraged to enjoy their time on the lake and not overthink activities invented purely for leisure. "It's more about the experience than actually learning how to water ski or wake surf."

On full-day tours and shorter trips, Canning and his staff provide insight into the history of the High Peaks, identifying landmarks and sharing the origins of some of the Great Camps that are sure to catch the eyes of any visitor.

"It reinstalls my appreciation for the area," he says. "I'm pointing out the mountains and the slides, how they've changed over the years. It really brings me back to why I love the area."

Canning's a native of Connecticut but moved to the area in 2000, and he's been waterskiing since he was a youngster. He eventually became passionate about other watersports, too; he was introduced to wake boarding at a snowboarding camp, and he instantly fell in love with it. His family — like those he now serves — had visited the Adirondacks regularly until finally relocating here.

Canning had plenty of teachers but had never considered instructing himself until about 15 years ago. As he was standing



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on a dock in Lake Placid, a family randomly approached him and asked if he knew of anyone in the area who taught waterskiing, as they hoped to find lessons for their children.

He wasn't aware of anyone or any business meeting their needs, but he offered to instruct the group himself. When the impromptu session was complete, the family — his first official customers — along with his now-wife encouraged him to pursue watersports instruction as a career.

"They kind of pushed me. They were like, 'You have to do this. You're good with the kids you know what you're talking about and got them skiing pretty easily.'"

Since then, he's witnessed a boom in watersports interest that he believes to be driven by two factors: older generations hoping to pass down the tradition of water skiing; concurrently, social media is spurring youth curiosity about other watersports.

"People are revisiting their pastimes," he says. "I think people really want to get into doing these sports, especially up here because it's a vacation activity; it's a small family group activity. You get to experience something that your parents and grandparents have done in the past."

With the proliferation of slower-speed watersports, Canning says the experience can feel extreme while still being gentle on the bodies of aging or older adults and relatively safe for children.

True to ADK Aquatics' roots, Canning and his staff of four or five cater largely to families visiting the region. The business is licensed by the State of New York, each staff member is CPR and First Aid certified and its two state-of-the-art

Nautique boats are inspected annually.

To date, the ADK Aquatics team has taken thousands of groups out onto Lake Placid to teach watersports or to simply let guests enjoy watersports in a casual manner.

The ADK Aquatics team emphasizes safety above all else; captains operate boats just fast enough to keep water skiers upright and at low speeds for both wake surfing and wakeboarding and tubing. A careful pace makes these already accessible sports that much more enticing to groups of travelers on a hot summer day.

"We keep it in control and safe and enjoyable for everybody," Canning says. "We want people to come back. We don't want to scare them away from the experience or even scare them away from watersports in general for the rest of their lives. So, providing an enjoyable experience is probably No. 1 on our list, even trumping learning the sport."

Even when a group doesn't request tubes, ADK Aquatics staff stows a couple onboard for each outing as a backup for guests who might want to abandon water skiing or wake options for a more relaxed ride.

It's part of Cannon's proven plan to foster a good time. "You're going to have fun no matter what."

For more information or to book a session, call 518-524-9767 or visit adkaquatics.com.

Casey Ryan Vock is a writer and photographer who grew up west of the Adirondacks in Jefferson County and a SUNY Plattsburgh alum who now lives in Maryland. He can be reached at caseyvock@gmail.com.