

Sunday, Aug 23, 2013 – the Vernon Morning Star

Society seeks new pontoon



The Okanagan Quality Life Society has been taking disabled and long-term care residents of the community for therapeutic outings on its boat Heaven Can Wait, which is being replaced after 21 years of service.

— image credit: Photo submitted by Dale Dunlop

- [Staff Writer - Vernon Morning Star](#)
- posted Aug 23, 2013 at 1:00 AM

It turns out heaven can't wait.

At least, not in the case of the Okanagan Quality Life Society's 24-foot pontoon boat named Heaven Can Wait.

After 21 seasons and delighting thousands of guests from facilities and programs such as Noric House, Gateby, Downs, Vernon Restholm, Polson Residential and many others, Heaven Can Wait will be retired at the end of 2013.

"A new pontoon boat will be purchased in 2014, and fundraising for that is underway," said Rob Irwin, with the Okanagan Quality Life Society.

Formed in 1992 as a charitable, non-profit organization, the Okanagan Quality Life Society provides a way for disabled members of the community and seniors in long-term care facilities to enjoy therapeutic outings on Okanagan Lake.

It was 103-year-old Rose Griffin who named the boat Heaven Can Wait in 1992, and enjoyed three more years of boating on it after she named it.

“It is my professional experience that all guests on the boat thoroughly enjoy their outings, not only from a recreational point of view but certainly also from a therapeutic one,” said Vernon recreation therapist Marijon Florentinus.

“After a boating trip they feel great.”

The society receives no government funding and relies upon charitable donations and volunteers from the local community to keep afloat.

Operating costs include insurance, equipment, boat and equipment maintenance and fuel.

The boat is moored for free at the Vernon Yacht Club and the Blue Heron Pub provides \$300 worth of gas each season.

There are between 25 and 30 trained volunteer “captains” of the boat who donate their time between June and September.

“Captains are stringently trained in safe boat handling practices, many are trained in standard first aid and the boat is maintained and equipped with safety and emergency equipment in compliance with Transport Canada guidelines,” said Irwin.

Each season, Heaven Can Wait makes more than 100 trips, uses at least 1,000 litres of fuel, puts in more than 350 volunteer hours and serves more than 600 guests.

If you’d like to be a member of the society (\$5 fee), volunteer to be a captain, make a donation or get more information, call president Ron Heuman at 250-558-1063.