

Vernon society sends seniors, shut-ins on boat excursions

Okanagan Quality Life Society has been providing Okanagan Lake boat rides for nearly 30 years



[Roger Knox](#)

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Larry King says he's been on the boat seven or eight times. Keith Johnson says the company is good, even the reporter sticking a video camera in front of his face.

Frank Neveu laughs when his wife, Wanda, brings up the memory of fishing trips the pair shared on their own boat.

King, Johnson and the Neveus are part of a group from Polson Special, where the men are residents, and on this recent hot Thursday morning, they are enjoying an outing on the Okanagan Quality of Life Society pontoon boat Heaven Can Wait II on Okanagan Lake.

The society's goal is to "provide persons with disabilities, seniors in care facilities and members of seniors centres in the Greater Vernon area the opportunity to enjoy therapeutic outings on beautiful Lake Okanagan."

It works. You couldn't wipe the smiles off the four Polson Special residents' faces.

"They really do enjoy it," said Coleen Noel, recreation assistant at Polson Special. "They find it very relaxing and it's nice when families can come aboard and experience how quiet and calming it is.

Wanda agrees. She and Frank have been out on the boat several times.

"It brings something back to them that maybe they enjoyed," she said. "Frank loved fishing and we had our own boat, so it's great to get him out on the boat to enjoy these outings. It's nice to get away from the home itself."

The society's beginnings can be traced back to the early 1990s when Frank Wright, a volunteer in seniors' residences, borrowed a boat made out of old oil barrels, some fencing and a tarp for shade to take seniors for rides on the lake. A plaque commemorating Wright adorns the Heaven Can Wait II.

Response was very enthusiastic and the society formed in 1992 to provide a way for disabled members of the community, and seniors in long-term care facilities, to enjoy the therapeutic boat rides.

A fundraising campaign was launched and a first pontoon boat was purchased, named Heaven Can Wait in a contest by 103-year-old Rose Griffin. That boat served the society well until 2012. A new campaign began in 2013, was very successful, and the Heaven Can Wait II, a 25.5 foot-long Avalon LS with three pontoons, a 90 HP motor and extra-wide doors to accommodate wheelchairs, was purchased.

Boat captains are all volunteers donating their time. On this excursion, the two captains are Darrin Taylor and Gary Morgan.

"I knew a few people through lawn bowling and square dancing that were captains and they said you seem to enjoy the water – I kayak as a hobby – would you like to try and be a captain," said Morgan. "Three days later, I was a captain. I've enjoyed every minute of it. It's so much fun seeing the people and seeing the joy in their faces as they're having a really good time."

More information on the society and the boat trips can be found at www.oqls.org.