

Up a Creek with a Board and a Paddle

You can try stand-up paddleboarding, Rochester's newest water sport, for free

By Amy Cavalier

I will never forget the first time I laid eyes on someone stand-up paddleboarding (SUP).

It was a hot day last August and I was lazily kayaking down Irondequoit Creek heading toward the bay. In the tall reeds appeared a man standing upright on what I could only describe as a surfboard. Wielding a long paddle, he placed the blade in the water an arms-length ahead of himself and slowly pulled it back toward himself through the water alongside the long board. Alternating his stroke from one hand to the other, he gracefully propelled himself through the water.

Immediately I knew it was something I had to try. Stand-up paddleboarding is a relatively new sport to Rochester.

"It's simply a lot of fun," said Ken Altfather, owner of Bay Creek Paddling Center. "For people who find kayaking maybe a little more sedate, this is a little more active and this gives you a different perspective on the water, being up taller and able to see more."

In an effort to introduce more people to the sport, Bay Creek, located on Empire Boulevard on the south end of Irondequoit Bay, offers the opportunity for about a dozen people to try it out for free every Friday at 6 p.m. during the paddling season. Bay Creek also sells the paddleboards and paddles, and gives lessons.

Altfather said stand-up paddleboarding has been a booming sport elsewhere, but up until last summer, very few people in Rochester were doing it, save those who already knew about it and owned their own boards.

"It moved around the coast and other areas where outdoor sports are pretty big pretty quickly, and in inland waters, not just ocean waters," he said. "It took its time to work its way around to us."

Altfather purchased Bay Creek's first few stand-up paddleboards in the summer of 2010 and said there was a "modest" response. Last year, he offered about a dozen paddleboards for rent. Over 100 people have signed up to try the sport through Meetup.com and as word has continued to grow, people are investing in the equipment.

If done correctly, Altfather said, stand-up paddleboarding can be a great workout.

"I really feel people need to learn the proper stroke to really tap into their core, otherwise they just paddle with their arms," he said. "It's great toning for your abs and back."

The sport is also popular for all ages.

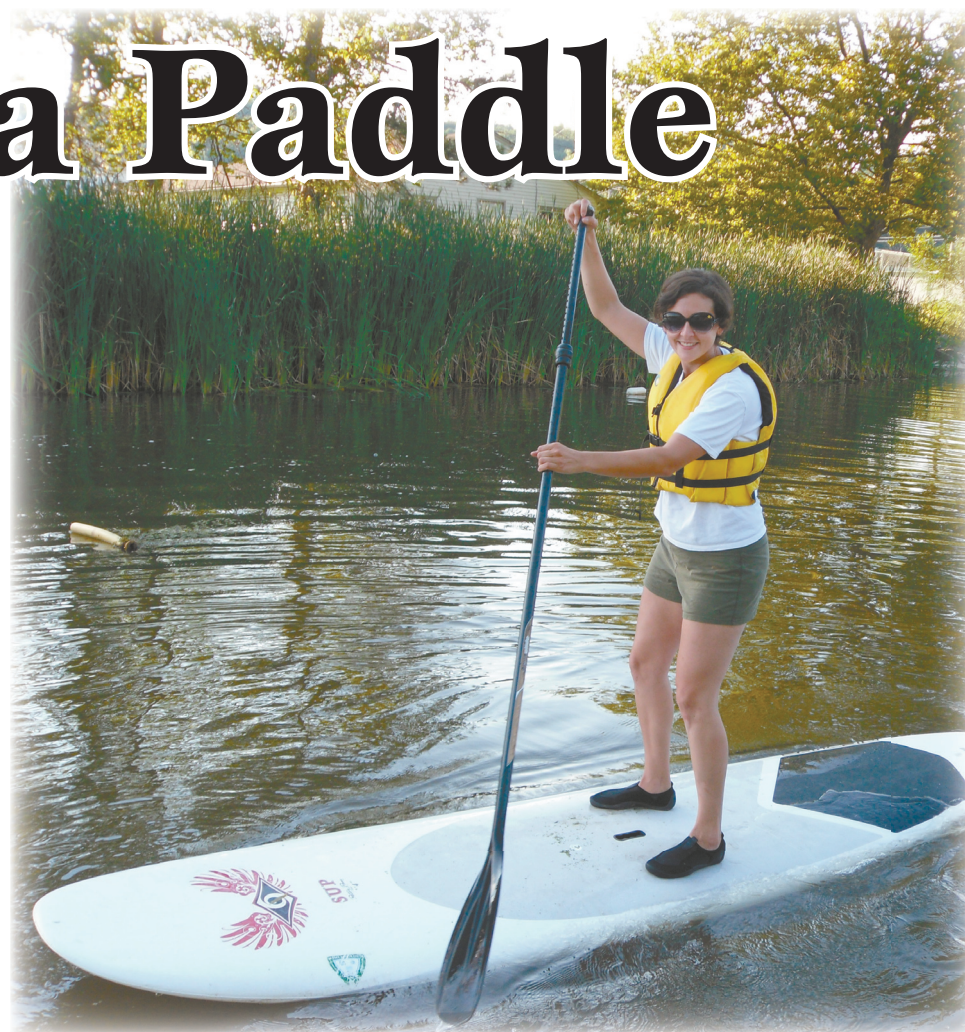
"I've sold them to people for their children, we've sold them to people in their 70s and people of all ages come and try it, so it really appeals to a wide demographic," he added.

Boards can range in cost from \$400 to upwards of \$2,000; paddles run anywhere from \$100 to \$350.

One of the biggest concerns beginners have is balance, Altfather said.

"When they get used to the balance, then it's working on control of the board, how to better paddle it, keep it under control," he said.

A kayaker myself, I took a stand-up paddleboarding lesson at Bay Creek last summer. Led by Altfather, the



Writer Amy Cavalier gives stand-up paddleboarding a try on the south end of Irondequoit Bay in the Irondequoit Creek in Penfield. A kayaker herself, she learned about the sport last year. "Immediately I knew it was something I had to try," she said.

class began on land covering the basics — general information about the board, the sport and the equipment.

The back of the board is called the tail and the front was called the nose. The sides of the board are called the rails; the top of the board is the deck, and the bottom is called the hull. A fin on the bottom of the board helps the board track in the water. Although the paddleboard terminology mimics surfing, stand-up paddleboards are bigger and made of different materials than surfboards.

The paddle has a blade and a shaft, terminology that comes from canoe racing. A leash connecting the paddleboarders' ankle to the board ensures that it will not float too far off if the rider falls off.

Altfather's lesson included details on how to select, adjust and hold a paddle properly. He also warned us of the "zone of destruction."

"It can be a dangerous piece of equipment," he said of the board. "When you're surfing, if you fall off the board it can shoot out from under you and gain velocity."

If you feel like you are going to fall, Altfather told us to get onto our knees until we felt stable. A life vest is required by law, Altfather said, and the best way to ride is barefoot.

"Any shoe adds uncertainty to your movement," he said.

After a lesson on falling and getting back onto the board, it was into the water. On the water, Altfather explained the two basic strokes — forward stroke and the hook stroke — demonstrating how they can be used to propel and turn the boat in the water.

Michelle Linse of Rochester also took a stand-up paddleboarding lesson from Altfather last summer. Having kayaked and tried to surf before, Linse

said she was curious about the sport.

"I would never ever make a fool of myself unless I really wanted to learn how to stand-up on a board and paddle," she says. "I have wretched balance so I'm not sure."

After spending a little less than an hour on the paddleboard, Linse said she would do it again.

"It was about as hard as I expected it to be which was hard," she said. "I'm a kayaker so I'm used to the shifting underneath you and paddling techniques, but the balance, you can never relax like a kayak, but that's only my first half hour."

Julie Jones of Rochester saw stand-up paddleboarding for the first time while on vacation.

"I was just afraid of falling in the water," she said, though she was able to avoid doing so. "It was fun, you get a different point of view than in a kayak and it was a good workout."

The day after my stand-up paddleboarding lesson, I could definitely feel some soreness in the muscles in my legs and abs. In addition to being a great workout, the sport gives you the feeling that you are experiencing something only a fraction of people ever will. Standing on my board, the paddle almost a natural extension of your body, the water lapping over your board over your feet, the final rays of sun slipping into the bay — there's no doubt I'd fallen hook line and sinker and I'll be back to try it again.



Ken Altfather, owner of Bay Creek Paddling Center, helps several people select the proper board during a stand-up paddleboarding lesson

For more information about Stand-up Paddleboarding in Rochester visit:
www.meetup.com/SUP-Rochester
www.baycreek.com/