

Venture Crew, Scouts dive in to learn about water safety

BY LAURA BERNERO

For the Courier

Margaret Kennedy has an appetite for adventure.

Growing up with brothers who were Boy Scouts, Kennedy felt like she was missing out on the high adventures her male siblings enjoyed.

But now, as president of a Venture Crew, she is satisfying her hunger for the outdoors.

Kennedy's Venture Crew joined other Scout troops for a boating and safety course hosted by the Littleton Fire Department and the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary on June 13 at Chatfield Reservoir.

The Littleton Fire Department Dive Team, which monitors the reservoir year-round, gave a presentation about the technology and equipment used in dives and rescues.

Scouts toured the fire department's water rescue vehicle and saw the dive equipment up close. They also learned the basics of using fire extinguishers while boating and tested the devices on a fake fire.

Several Boy Scout troops attended the event as well as Venture Crews and Sea Scouts, two branches of the Boy Scouts of America. Venture Scouting is open to both males and females ages 14 to 21; Sea Scouts is also open to both genders and focuses on water sports and water education.

Kennedy, a junior at Chatfield



MIKE VOSS, center, fire chief and member of the Littleton Fire Department dive team, displays dive equipment to Scout troops at Chatfield Reservoir on June 13. The fire department partnered with local members of the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary to host the boating safety event.

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The event at Chatfield was a chance for the two organizations to come together for education and shared enjoyment of water sports, McNeil said.

"The relationship between the Scouts and the auxiliary is to promote safe boating and to establish contacts," she said. "We want the Scouts to look up to the professionals as examples of potential careers or hobbies they could pursue. Plus, we want everyone to come out and have fun and learn something new."

The Boy Scouts of America just approved jet-skiing as a permitted activity for Scouts, so the local Coast Guard Auxiliary hopes to partner with Scout troops to offer a jet-ski safety course and other events.

"Our goal is to offer education for the Scouts and the public. By having the basic knowledge and training, you can have a much more pleasant experience and pass that expertise along when you do go out on the water," McNeil said.

High School, formed a Venture Crew with five friends just this summer, and the class was the first event they attended as a group.

Although Kennedy is a Girl Scout, she was disappointed that Scouting rules dissuaded girls from trying high-risk sports and outdoor activities.

"I am looking forward to doing a lot of high-adventure things as a Venture Scout. I want to have more outdoor experiences, because in Girl Scouts we usually just stay in a cabin. This looked like even more fun," Kennedy said.

Venture Crews are designed to be informal and less restrictive than Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts. The groups are led by the students, who can plan the outdoor activities they want to try. Kennedy's group is planning an outdoor agenda for the coming year that includes a whitewater raft trip in July.

John Ostrom, crew adviser, also saw the difference in rules between Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts and wanted both genders to have the same experiences.

"I wanted these girls to have the same opportunities that my sons

did," Ostrom said. "Our experience at the reservoir today is the first of many adventures we are looking forward to as a group."

The Coast Guard Auxiliary, the voluntary branch of the U.S. Coast Guard, organized the June 13 event to offer expertise on water safety and encourage the Scouts to pursue water sports.

Amy McNeil, a member of the auxiliary as well as a commissioner of Venture Scouting in Littleton, organized the event after local Scout troops requested a boating safety course earlier in the year.

Sides draw battle lines over proposed tax hike for schools

BY GABRIELLE PORTER

Staff Writer

The pro and con contingents are drawing up battle lines over the proposed property-tax increase for Jeffco schools on the November ballot.

Opponents say the tax increase would not fully address the district's budget issues or guarantee improved student performance, and that the district can find other places to cut the budget. Proponents counter that the increase would help a district ravaged by budget cuts over the past several years and help keep residential property values in the county high by maintaining quality schools.

County residents will vote on a mill-levy increase that would generate \$39 million for the district's operating fund and a bond issue that would allow the district to borrow \$99 million to use for building maintenance.

The measures, known as 3A and 3B, will be voted on separately on Nov. 6. If both are approved, they would increase property taxes on

a \$250,000 home by about \$126 a year. The school district is paying off a bond borrowed in 1992 that will equate to \$90 in property-tax savings for that same household, so the net impact would be approximately \$36 per year.

The school district has cut \$63 million from the budget over the last three years, and it has chopped another \$15 million from the 2012-13 budget. It will face another \$43 million in cuts for 2013-14, projecting that it will need to cut 600 jobs.

Tax-hike opponents

Opponents of the measures say increased spending does not guarantee improved student performance, and that the money brought in from the taxes wouldn't come close to covering projected budget cuts.

While the district has made program and personnel cuts over the last three years, total general fund spending has actually continued to increase faster than inflation, said Sheila Atwell, executive director of the nonprofit Jeffco Students First.

In the 2004-05 school year, general fund spending was \$540 million. In 2007-08, it was \$625 million, and in 2010-11, \$639 million, according to the district's comprehensive annual financial reports.

The district's chief financial officer, Lorie Gillis, said planned spending for 2012-13 is \$64 million lower than actual expenditures in 2009-10.

"Expenditures did increase for a few years after 2005," Gillis wrote in an e-mail. "2005 was seven years ago; costs and mandates have increased over the past seven years."

Gillis said that spending increased from 2005 to 2010 because of a property-tax increase that voters passed in November 2004. That money was spent from 2004 to 2008 to allow the district's reserves to build up.

Atwell also said student enrollment has declined slightly, and Jeffco students' test scores haven't changed much, although the district generally has better

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