



WAKING TO A WORLD OF WONDER

NATIONAL EVENT SERIES FOR KIDS FROM CHILDREN'S HOMES EXPANDS TO ARIZONA

STORY AND PHOTOS BY RANDALL BOHL

Wake the World, founded in 2007 by Greg Hodgkin of Greensboro, North Carolina, is a nonprofit charitable organization which invites kids from children's homes out for a day at the lake. The idea was actually inspired in 2006, when friends from church had done exactly that: brought kids from a local children's home out boating. Hodgkin thought this was a good idea. But when his wife Lois suggested that, to be fair, they'd have to invite *all* the children ... it gave him pause. But only till the next boating season. Then it gave him ideas.

Their first group took to the water in 2007, and Wake the World has since grown tremendously. Not only are there now four events in North Carolina, but volunteers have started chapters of the organization in ten other states: Alabama, California, Illinois, Missouri, Oregon, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, West Virginia ... and now Arizona.

Volunteers just seem to materialize, as do sponsors—through boaters' word of mouth, as well as via Facebook and other social networking, and on waketheworld.org. In the case of Arizona, Dustin Pelzel went to bat. "I had a friend who put on this event in Southern California. He talked about it and how he had a blast. He gave me the contact info to get hold of Greg. From the first moment I talked to Greg about everything, it just made me want to get more involved."

Shea Lyane, whom you might call the co-founder of Wake the World Arizona, was soon on board. Here is Shea's story:

"While out boating one day, Dustin Pelzel mentioned how a friend of his had hosted an event

called Wake the World in California, and that he would like to bring it to Arizona. I did some research on it, thought it looked like a wonderful cause and told him to let me know how I could be of assistance, but didn't give it much more thought.

"A few weeks later, I met a girl named Alex Waggoner and began working on her project, the Arizona WakeGirls. Arizona WakeGirls is an all girls wakeboarding/action sports group that is all about getting the ladies involved and excited about the sport.

"I remembered Dustin and Wake the World, so I called him to see where he was in the planning process and what needed to be done. He said he hadn't had much of a response to the event and didn't really know where to go from there.

"I watched every video from the previous Wake the World events. I was completely moved and felt the weight on my heart telling me that I needed to bring this to Arizona. Dustin and I set the date and location, and got out participants. After those three were in place, everything just came together. We had a huge influx of volunteers, boat owners and people who wanted to donate. No solicitation was necessary. Many phone calls and emails were exchanged between Dustin, myself and Greg, and before I knew it, it was just a few days before the event!

"I was extremely ecstatic about hosting the event, but had no idea of the extent to which we truly were making a difference, until we were lucky enough to visit the Sunshine Acres children's home. The second we walked through the door, I knew that it would not be my last time there.

"We watched a video on the history of the home, toured the 125-acre property and from then my heart was changed. It was no longer about the wakeboarding, the sponsors, volunteers or the boats. It was about the children. It was about sharing with them something that many of the volunteers and local boat owners are lucky enough to do multiple times a week."

Sunshine Acres—on N. Higley Road in Mesa—is a privately owned, privately- and donor-funded home for homeless children, orphaned or abandoned. Founded in 1954 by Reverend Jim and Vera Dingman, Sunshine Acres has been the home to more than 1,600 children. It is currently residence to about 170 children. An interesting point made by the facility's Bart Meeker, during our visit at Bartlett Lake, was that these kids aren't turned out at age 18. Sunshine Acres will help them through college. They do not solicit donations, but enjoy support from many individuals, foundations and corporations. One prominent individual is Kurt Warner, former NFL quarterback of the Arizona Cardinals. The facility also takes material donations and operates a dona-



tions center store, the Sunshine Boutique, on premises. Visitors are welcome; complete details can be found at sunshineacres.org.

EVENT DAY: OCTOBER 13, 2012

We arrived at Bartlett Lake about 8 am on the day of the event, on a perfect Arizona fall day, with a temperature of about 65 degrees, expected to reach near 90 by afternoon. Eleven boats were lined up at the marina dock: Malibus, MB Sports, Super Air Nautiques, MasterCraft and Dustin's own 2011 Axis A22 Vandall Edition.

Dustin tells us this Axis "has upgraded speakers throughout the boat from Exile Audio, 3000 pounds of ballast, plus an auto set wedge. Axis is a Malibu-made boat with the better things you want in a wakeboard boat. It seats 15 people, and its windows are different than any other boat. Radical in design, it looks different than any other boat. It makes a very huge and rampy wake, which often scares some of my friends, but everybody loves it!"

At 9 am, the kids from Sunshine Acres arrived—15 kids in all, plus three chaperones. Granted 15



KEEP RIGHT >>



he is planning Wake the World Colorado for spring of 2013—again using Facebook and word-of-mouth expansion.

These lucky 15 kids were able to go out basically two per boat, and try anything they wanted for the whole day—wakeboarding, wake surfing, kneeboarding, water skiing and tubing—they had it all. Volunteers went into the water with the kids to coach them, be it on wakeboards or skis. There were a lot of ups and downs, with a lot of support. But the best moments were when a kid skied or boarded away from his or her volunteer, leaving them behind to be picked up by another boat.

Lunch was, of course, hot dogs and hamburgers on the grill, with discussions of what had been done all morning and what everyone wanted to do in the afternoon. There were smiles all around. Your correspondent and crew had a ball just attempting to photograph this organized chaos, and thoroughly enjoyed the boat rides ourselves, shooting photos boat-to-boat.

Dustin sums things up by saying, “my thoughts on the event are very memorable as one of the best days of my life. Not only did I have an impact on the kids, but I got a lot of adults who came to volunteer, who thanked me and said they were just blessed to be a part of it. It changed their thoughts on a lot of things as well.

Shea adds, “I was on the hype boat that went around cheering on the kids as they were boarding, surfing or tubing. To see all of our work for the event come together was overwhelming. Watching the amazing volunteers in each individual boat helping these kids, seeing kids get up on a wakeboard on their first try made me so happy. Hearing all the stories, seeing the smiles and excitement on the faces of everyone is what made me realize how lives had been changed that day. I am looking forward to doing things throughout the year with the kids of Sunshine Acres and most of all, I can’t wait for Wake the World 2013!” ■

kids is not a huge crowd, but with the event having been arranged in one month’s time, many of the residents had other weekend plans. (At the end of the day, we were told that once the stories made it back to Sunshine Acres, there would surely be a huge turnout for Wake the World Arizona II.)

The day started with “the sponge game” (we asked for a better name but there was none), where the kids and volunteers divide into small teams and pass a soaking wet sponge from one bucket, over their heads, down a line. The sponge is rung out into another bucket and run back to the front person, until the first bucket is empty. Of course, more water ends up on the participants than actually makes it to that second bucket. With a lot of laughter, it was a great way for the kids and the boaters to lighten up and get to know one another before jumping in the boats and heading out onto the lake.

Greg Hodgkin had flown into town (on his own dime, of course) to help Dustin and Shea with things like the sponge game and general organization of the event. Daren Pierson, a high school friend of Greg’s, was also on hand from Colorado to learn everything he could about the event, as

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azwakegirls.com
 Facebook.....facebook.com/az.wakegirls
 email.....waketheworldaz@gmail.com

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 Century Marine.....centurymarine.com
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SUNSHINE ACRES INFORMATION

.....sunshineacres.org

WAKE THE WORLD (NATIONAL)

.....waketheworld.org

