

# Outdoors

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Covering the outdoors scene

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## NASA helps elderly, physically challenged



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NASA, the space agency, is having trouble getting its shuttle off the ground, but NASA, the squirrel group, is finding smooth sailing with its pontoon boat.

NASA, the North American Squirrel Association, is a local group with one mission in mind: to make life a little more enjoyable for others. The latest creation is a pontoon boat built especially for the elderly and physically challenged. The boat

is docked near Schaefer's Boat Livery on Brice Prairie, a long-time mom and pop bait shop that NASA co-founder Tony Christnovich bought recently.

NASA's pontoon boat is handicapped accessible and provides an excellent environment to fish from on Lake Onalaska. It doesn't cost to rent the boat. Shucks, the fuel is also free. If that's not enough, NASA will furnish a captain and fishing guide. Yes, for free.

Needless to say, the pontoon boat is getting plenty of use this summer. For example, Til Chernick celebrated her 95th birthday on the boat with her son Skip Klein, daughter Mick Wilder and their spouses last week. Til caught five sunfish and two bass from her wheelchair.

"She had a great time, riding out on the lake, seeing the peli-

**The North American Squirrel Association bought a pontoon boat built especially for the elderly and physically challenged recently.**

cans, fishing and spending the afternoon with her family," said Janice Klein, Til's daughter-in-law. "All this was possible because of The North American Squirrel Association."

Janice Klein said Til would not have been able to enjoy her birthday had it not been for the pontoon boat, featuring a wheelchair ramp.

"Our fishing boat is too hard for Til to get into any longer," Janice Klein said. "She hasn't

been able to fish for many years, but got a chance to do it on her 95th. She was thrilled."

Christnovich said he remembers the look on Til's face after returning from her day of "fun in the sun."

"This lady had the biggest smile on her face that you could ever imagine," he said, after a busy Monday. "We had a group of men from Hillview Nursing Home out today. They caught northerners. It was so great to see those guys out enjoying the river."

Christnovich said elderly and physically challenged people wishing to take out the boat should call him at the bait shop at (608) 781-3100 because the non-profit group's Web site at [www.nasasquirrel.org](http://www.nasasquirrel.org) is not functioning right now.

"We apologize for that," said

Christnovich, who earlier on Monday helped take a group of children from Chileda to Jay and Wayne Flury's trout fishing farm near Waumandee, Wis.

Each child had a mentor and was taught how to bait a hook and cast. The children caught fish almost at will, according to Christnovich. Most of the fish were returned to the water, but a few were kept, fried up and fed to the kids.

"The kids couldn't believe how well the fish tasted," Christnovich said.

To join NASA, or to learn about the group's deer hunts or fishing trips for the elderly and disabled, give Christnovich a call at the bait shop.

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