

KEEPING POST-ED This week in the Back Mountain

THURSDAY 4 Dallas Rotary meets tonight...The Harveys Lake Borough Council meets tonight at 8 at the Daniel C Roberts Fire Hall...

FRIDAY 5 The regular monthly meeting of the J.R. Davis Fire Company is tonight...Sweet Valley Girl Scout Troops organize tonight from 6:30 to 8 at the fire hall...

SATURDAY 6 Don't forget the Luzerne County Fall Fair, Lehman Horse Show Grounds...The Confirmation Class of Blessed Sacrament Church, Centermoreland will meet this afternoon at 2 for instruction and fittings...

SUNDAY 7 The Luzerne County Fall Fair ends today, don't miss it...Back Mountain mini football begins their season today...It's Sunday, worship at the church of your choice...

MONDAY 8 The Welcome Wagon Club of Wyoming Valley meets tonight 7:45 Hayfield Campus, Penn State...The Elders Council of the Senior Citizen's Center meets at 2 p.m...

TUESDAY 9 The Luzerne County Sunday School Association will hold a rally at the Carverton United Methodist Church at 7:30 p.m...Do your shopping today at one of the supermarkets advertised in the Post...

WEDNESDAY 10 Reservations are due for Prince of Peace Women's luncheon, call 675-5034...Kingston Township Tax Collector will sit at Wyoming National Bank, Shavertown from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. today...

Patrol boat guards use of Harveys Lake

by Terry Bonifanti

Every Saturday, Sunday and holiday throughout the summer a patrol boat carrying Claude Niefert Jr., alone, or with one of his deputies, cruises the shores of Harveys Lake three times, spending an average of eight hours on the lake.

Niefert is the Pennsylvania Fish Commission's Waterways Patrolman for Luzerne County. He and his men are on the lake "to enforce the fish and boat laws and, of course, to promote safety on the waters."

Last Sunday, on what Niefert said was "the lightest" Labor Day weekend boat wise he has seen in his 10 years on Harveys Lake. I accompanied him and one of his assistants' Charles Urban, a special waterways patrolman, on one of the three cruises they made around the lake. The three-hour cruise brought us completely around the lake and into the boats and onto the docks of some pleasant and some not so pleasant lawbreakers.

Immediately after starting out, Niefert spotted a violation, a boat moving in the wrong direction around the lake. Since we were cruising toward the boat, the officers waited til the boat was within calling distance and waved it over. Prior to our approaching the boat, Urban warned me to be ready for anything. "We got profane language, everything yelled at us as we go around the lake, sometimes from cars going by on the road, sometimes from the boats."

Urban also said, "If they'd only understand we're not out here to harass them. We're here to see they obey the laws for their own sake."

On the first boat stopped, the people were very friendly, the officers courteous. However, the boat's operator, a man who claimed to have been boating for over 10 years, was completely ignorant of the law he had violated. The law, which states that a boat cruising within 100 feet of the shore line must do so in a counterclockwise direction, is five years old.

The violator was given a copy of the 1975 Summary of Pleasure Boating Requirements, a handbook given to each boater every year as he registers his boat.

"If these people would only take the time to look through this booklet," Niefert said, "but they don't. A majority of these people don't take any regard for operation rules and procedure."

He added, "Automobile rule and regulation books are usually seen by a driver only once, prior to his initial examination. These boating requirement booklets and the fish rules and regulation booklets are handed out every year with the boat registrations and fishing licenses. Yet far fewer people are aware of the rules of the waterways than the rules of the road."

As we pulled away from the boat, it turned in the right direction and continued on.

Urban's belief that not all boaters are courteous was soon proved true. Immediately in front of the patrol boat, a highpowered motorboat took off from a dock at a high rate of speed causing a large swell, or wake near the dock. The officers waved to the operator and as the boat reduced speed the young man greeted the wardens with "What's your problem?", with neither respect nor courtesy.

When the officers explained the violation, they denied it. After again explaining the observed actions, the officers let him go with a warning. The young man took off in a burst of speed only to have the wardens yell to him again. He then slowed his engine until far enough away from the patrol boat to be out of hearing distance.

For the remaining time the patrol boat was on the lake, the boat stopped for its fast takeoff could be seen veering away everytime it caught sight of the patrol boat. This procedure, not uncommon with many boaters, according to Niefert. He said, "on the average Sunday, when a lot of boats are on the lake, if the patrol boat is down this end, most of them are up that end, and vice versa."

Following the incident with the hostile young man who took off too fast, a boat came at the patrol boat from amidst a large number of sailboats near the Yacht Club. The boat was

traveling near the shore, at a high rate of speed clockwise and heading straight for the patrol boat. Instead of cutting out into the deeper water, the boat came along the right side of the patrol boat, near the shore and was stopped by the wardens. The driver smirked as the boats approached each other.

As Urban explained what he had done, and as the operator confessed to complete ignorance of boating procedure, spaced between several wisecracks, Niefert identified the operator as a "repeater." He said both this operator and the other hostile operator previously had been arrested and charged with boating law violations. This operator was previously assessed a \$50 fine. The other was found guilty by a magistrate and is appealing the decision. "I don't like to keep running into the same ones, but it seems year after year, there they are," he said.

After explaining the violation, Urban asked him to produce his boat registration, which he could not. Urban then inspected the boat for safety requirements and said he would have to see the registration. Niefert explained the patrol boat would be cruising the lake for a while and asked, if the operator would go and get the registration and bring it out.

The operator informed the officers he didn't want to bring it out, he was "gonna do some drinking, why don't you come over my place and get it."

Urban then gave the man a card with his address and asked him to mail the registration, and the man said, "I don't see why you just don't come and get it."

Niefert explained to the man the officers did not have time to follow everyone and told him to either bring it out or mail it. "We don't do this for harassment," Urban said again, "that boat could be stolen. We could've given that man a citation."

After the other boat took off, Niefert said, "We'll never see that registration." If the young man fails to produce the registration, he will face a \$25 fine. He was also issued a written warning for his boat's safety violations.

Boating law violations can carry fines up to \$100, according to Niefert. The Fish Commission officers can either warn violators or have them brought before a magistrate. They usually recommend the penalty they feel fit to the magistrate. The same applies to fish rule and regulation violation. However, violation of fish rules and regulations carry fines up to \$1,000.

On the one trip around the lake, the officers encountered three fishermen in violation of the law and two possible violations. "The most frequent fish law violations are "litter and no license," according to Urban.

Litter abounds at Harveys Lake. "It comes out of boats, from fishermen, and out of cars." The proximity of the road to the lake makes car litterers the problem of the fish commission too. Cruising the lake, beer cans, paper bags, rotting food line the shore lines.

Fishing license violations also are frequent at Harveys Lake. The officers questioned two young men who claimed to be under the required age and were unable to produce identification in the Sunset boat mooring section of the lake. The wardens will now contact the boys' schools to ascertain their ages.

Urban said it's very easy to lie about your age. He said he once questioned a young man fishing without a license who claimed to be too young. "When I asked him to produce identification, he came up with a Pennsylvania drivers license," he said.

While cruising toward the pier at Hanson's amusement park, the officers noticed two fishermen on the pier, one of which disappeared as the boat approached. Both fishermen were in violation of the fishing license law. The one who stayed, had a license but was not wearing his button. He was verbally warned. The one who left, was recovered on foot by Urban. He was a non-resident with a resident's license. The wardens gave him time and told him where he could purchase the correct license. Urban was left on the dock until his return. Niefert continued to cruise the

lake. Another frequent fishing violation, Niefert said, is untended lines. Fishermen have two or three lines in the water and are as far as 50 to 100 feet away from them. Others put lines in the water and go into the house and check them only once in a while.

"While cruising the lake, we are constantly watching for lines in the water, or fish on a stringer, which we check for size," Niefert said.

One such untended line turned up Sunday. It belonged to a young man who was nearly 50 feet away from it on the other side of a boat house. The violation was explained to him and he went over to his line.

"Since our main purpose is the prevention of violations, much of what we do is to act as a deterrent," Niefert said. "We cruise the lake from 10 a.m. to midnight on Saturdays, Sundays and holidays, we pass out literature, we put up warning buoys and maintain them and we stop violations and attempt to educate them."

The fish commission operates a mobile cruiser to distribute literature and show movies. The unit was at Harveys Lake Sunday. Throughout the winter and summer, the commission offers safe boating courses, but they are sparsely attended, according to Niefert.

The uniformed officers of the Fish Commission are men who believe in what they are doing. Except for Niefert, the other wardens in Luzerne County are volunteers, from all walks of life who receive no compensation for fish work and little for boat work", according to Niefert.

They are there like Urban, who "was a great fisherman and sportsman and saw littering, unsafe practices and unsportsmanship" and tried to stop it and had to become a warden before anyone would listen.

Urban said, "I do it mostly for conservation sake. I think of the future." There are some benefits. The wardens get to talk to people. They get to help people. Sometimes they even get to "blow the whistle" and bring a smile to the face of some youngsters.

Some people believe them incompetent harassers and greet them with hostility, ignorance and disrespect. Some believe they have all the answers even to questions like, "Where are the fish biting in this lake?" or "Why aren't the fish biting?"

Both of those questions were answered by the wardens Sunday. To the first the reply was, "They're biting everywhere son, you just have to make the lake cooperate." The second, "We can't make them bite for you son, you have to have patience."

If the wardens stopped just the number of boats I saw in violation on my Sunday cruise, it would probably take them 10 hours to circle the lake. "We have to look for the one "that's potentially dangerous," they told me. Several possible license violations, registration violations, improper placement of registration number instances, had to be ignored.

There were 29 boat-related fatalities in the state of Pennsylvania this summer. Some of the boats on Harveys Lake are capable of achieving a speed of 55 to 60 miles per hour, and the majority of boat owners don't even appear to know the laws governing the waterways.

Niefert foresees the day when restrictions will become stiffer if present laws and commonsense are not used. "I can see the day when we're going to have some limitation or at least regulation on speed here at Harveys Lake."

The waterways patrolman said "Speed and large boats are shrinking this and other lakes." Something has to be done.

Until something is done, or at least for this year until right before the ice forms, Niefert with or without a deputy will continue trying to educate, trying to promote safety, enforcing laws and acting as a deterrent to violations on Harveys Lake.

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Photo by Terry Bonifanti

LICENSE VIOLATION—Fish Commission wardens Claude Niefert, Jr. and Charles Urban caution a young man ignorant of fishing license rules Sunday at Harveys Lake.



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