Local

Special needs children, family enjoy carefree summer fun

BY DEB CLEWORTH
CENTRAL WISCONSIN SUNDAY

PITTSVILLE — Brittany Zebrowsky runs around in her two-piece swimsuit Saturday afternoon, her reddish-brown hair jutting from beneath her red baseball cap.

Her laughs and smile mix in with the other children near the lake as they enjoy swimming, jet skiing and other summer fun.

The group looks like any large gathering of family and friends.

Then, without missing a beat, Brittany takes off her cap, revealing a large, bald spot.

She doesn’t care. The 11-year-old from Hartland still runs, plays and laughs.

This is her day, along with hundreds of other children at the United Special Sportsmen Alliance’s third annual Outdoor Water Sport Event.

Children with special needs and life-threatening illnesses come for the day to just be kids. They are joined by family — and newfound friends.

This is Brittany’s first year at the camp. She has brain tumors and just completed radiation therapy in Boston.

“I absolutely love it,” she said of the event.

Miles Miller, 17, of Dousman is a member of the junior board of directors. He caught sight of Brigid O’Donoghue, the founder of the organization. Saturday was her 42nd birthday, and Miller wants to give her a hug, along with birthday wishes.

“It’s a lot of fun,” said Miller, who has cerebral palsy, “It’s a great event. This is an incredible organization and it’s great to be a part of it.”

The day brings out all sorts of volunteers, from professional fishermen and hunters to parents helping out with food.

There are trampolines, archery events, demonstrations and horse rides. And of course, the water is a big draw.

Brittany has made fast friends with Wesley Johnson, 19, of Spencer and his family. Wesley has Down syndrome and is having a blast in the water. Just before joining Brittany on the beach, Wesley was swinging from a bar suspended by a backhoe, laughing as he lets go to hit the water.

“This is absolutely awesome,” said Wesley’s dad, Ron Johnson, 46.

Johnson surveys the mass of families eating and enjoying the atmosphere.

“You can’t ask for anything better than you see here,” Johnson said.

Kelsie Reinhard, 11, of Wautoma sights a bow with help from John Haydock of Junction City on Saturday at the United Special Sportsmen Alliance’s third annual Outdoor Water Sport Event at a Jackson County cranberry marsh.

Find out more

To find out more about the United Special Sportsmen Alliance, go to www.childswish.com; call 800-518-8019; or write to United Special Sportsman Alliance, 7864 Shotwell Road, Pittsville WI 54466.

Wisconsin Rapids agrees.

She and her son, Tyler Cowan, 17, who is cognitively delayed, also are at the event for the first time.

“He’s having a blast,” Dillingham said.

Tyler had caught three fish earlier in the day and proudly shows photos taken by Dave Knutson of Eastman, who was there with the Falling Rock Walleye Club.

“I think it’s pretty neat,” Knutson said, smiling at Tyler.