

Community Health & Wellness

Water sports for summer fitness, family fun

By Catherine Beeghly

As temperatures hover around the triple-digits, seize the opportunity for some physical fitness with your group of family or friends. Take a plunge together in a pool or natural swimming area. Water toys can enhance your time together, promoting camaraderie, competitiveness, and exercise.

That's why Tim Leefeldt, a Chico product innovator and architect, created the Water Ripper. He got the idea for it 26 years ago, and continues to develop and promote its uses.

"It's exhilarating to be involved in the creation of new sports," said Leefeldt, who's come up with dozens of activities with his water toy. Versions of golf, polo, soccer, bowling and tennis can be played on the water.

Leefeldt calls the Water Ripper an adaptive use waterbag for innovative watersports. The bag skips across the water's surface like a rock, slowing down at the end of each throw. The soft bag is much less dangerous than throwing a rock when other people are around. It also floats, so it won't get lost on the floor of the pool or creek.



Braedyn Schweniger, 7, said he enjoyed playing with the Water Ripper last Tuesday afternoon at One-Mile Dam Recreation Area, Bidwell Park, in Chico.

Leefeldt had no trouble recruiting nearby swimmers to play Water Ripper games last week at One-Mile Dam Recreation Area. "Once people discover it, most are like me. They can't leave it alone," he said.

Coaches and parents can use it to build athletic skills, starting with simple eye-hand coordination with throwing and catching.

Leefeldt tossed a rubber duckie into the middle of the pool at One-Mile, sharing Water Rippers with those nearby, and inviting them to join in the game of hitting the yellow target. "Try to nail it!" he yelled, as kids scurried over to try. "Try to make the duck roll over."

Dogs can get involved in games in

the water, but Leefeldt recommended supervision so animals don't chew up unattended water balls.

The Water Ripper debuted at the New York Toy Fair in 2011. Leefeldt enjoys staging different outreach campaigns to keep water sports in the public eye. "It's ongoing," he said. "I'm always promoting it and testing out new ideas. I emphasized water golf last year. This year I introduced them at the public pools in Paradise and Durham. I'll be going to some aquatic festivals next," he said.

Water Rippers can be used by people enjoying the water from kayaks or rafts, as well as those who prefer to sit at the side of the pool and not get too wet.

Water Rippers are available at local stores like Powell's Sweet Shoppe, Zucchini & Vine, and Bird in Hand in Chico. "For me, it's not about selling products," Leefeldt said. "It's about showing people how they can have fun and be safe on the water."

For more, go to Ripperball.com, or e-mail tim@ripperball.com.



Tim Leefeldt

Watersports enthusiast shares water safety tips

Tim Leefeldt has spent decades enjoying water recreation, and encourages people of all ages to follow a few safety tips on the water.

"Be aware of your surroundings. Know the depth of the water you're in," he said. "Be aware of other people and where they are if you're playing a game, especially if you're doing something that involves toys. Let other people pass before you throw something. Be kind and respectful of other people using the waterway. When we play water golf out on the river, for example, we make sure to be respectful of the fishermen."

With any toss-and-catch activity, make sure the intended recipient is aware an object is being thrown. "Be aware of your target. Maintain eye contact with the person you're throwing something to, and be sure that person is ready."

Be courteous to lifeguards, or anyone asking about your water activities. "Be respectful of the pool and other people using it. Some pools do not allow water toys at all, and some don't allow them during certain hours," Leefeldt said. "Don't let stupidity govern, but have fun."

A boy defended a shot on a homemade goal in a water soccer-type game, played at One-Mile last week.

A common rubber duckie works as a floating or land target for outdoor watersports, such as water golf and water soccer.