

Janesville's Rock Aqua Jays defy gravity, draw cheers

By Jason Francis
Special to the Lakes Edition

For decades, the Rock Aqua Jays have been turning skiing into an art form, and the team's shows have consistently brought wonder and awe to the "art critics" that line the shoreline as enthusiastic witnesses.

The Aqua Jays are considered the most successful water ski show team in the world, and the evidence for that is convincing. During its 56-year history, the team has notched more than 60 total tournament victories, including 19 U.S. National Championships since 1975. More than 100,000 people attend the team's shows, special events and tournaments each year.

The award-winning, record-breaking, world-renowned ski team typically performs twice a week during the summer

on the Rock River in the beautiful setting of Traxler Park (600 N. Main St.) in Janesville. The talented skiers of all ages present theatrically-themed performances featuring gravity-defying pyramids, wakeboarding, ballet moves, jumps and barefoot skiing.

The first show of the club's 2017 season is scheduled for Sunday, May 28, at 7 p.m.

Barring rare tournament obligations and other special events, Aqua Jays performances run every Sunday and Wednesday evening from Memorial Day weekend through Labor Day weekend.

Shows typically start at 7 p.m. through mid-August, and 6:30 p.m. the rest of August and early September. There will also be a special 4th of July "Independence Day on the Rock" show at 7 p.m.

Admission is free to

the 70-minute ski shows, which include 10-minute intermissions. Donations are appreciated.

The Aqua Jays not only wow the locals and area tourists at home, but they have taken their watery stage around the world, with record-breaking results. In September of 2012, a team of 32 skihappy Jays—along with two Rockford Ski Broncs, two Muskego Water Bug Warriors, and 12 members of the Chinese Water Ski Team — established a new, Guinness-verified world record for a human pyramid while performing in the city of Linyi in the province of Shandong in the People's Republic of China on Sept. 23 of 2013. The talented daredevil skiers completed a quadruple, 4-tier human pyramid. An amazing 48 people stacked and girded themselves during the breathtaking stunt.

Members of the Aqua Jays have also helped bring a national team of All-Star skiers to prominence on the world stage. In 2012, the Aqua Jays hosted the first-ever World Show Ski Tournament. Eight active Rock Aqua Jays were selected to perform on the 35-person U.S. Water Ski Show team. Team USA didn't disappoint by taking first place in the tournament.

In 2014, the Aqua Jays again hosted the international tournament and Team USA took first place again, topping four other international teams. Last

year, during the biennial world tournament in Wisconsin Rapids, several Aqua Jays and other local water skiers were part of the USA team that won its third consecutive world title.

This year, the Aqua Jays will again be hosting the Mercury Open Water Ski Show Tournament on June 24. The state championship competition will be held in Wisconsin Rapids, July 20-23, and the national tournament will be held in Rockford, Ill., on Aug. 11-13.

In 2017, the Aqua Jays hope to add to their impressive trophy collection. By winning the Mercury Marine Open, Wisconsin State and national tournaments in the same year, the club has scored major tournament "Triple Crowns" eleven times: in 1981, 1985, 1987, 1988, 1993, 1999, 2003, 2005, 2011, 2013 and 2014.

The Aqua Jays have won the national tournament 19 times and placed second nearly as many times. They have won the state competition 17 times (including last year), the Mercury Open 17 times (including last year) and the Lamb's Farm Invitational (a tournament that was discontinued in 2000) 11 times.

Now well known for "going big" when it comes to tournament wins and pyramids, the Aqua Jays are going big in another way in 2017 with the addition of a state-of-the-art, custom-built, first-of-its-

kind show ski boat designed by D & S Marine to speed through the water while towing 50 or more skiers at a time. The boat, which was still under construction as of March, will boast three 300-horsepower Mercury Marine motors. It measures in at 87 inches wide and nearly 21 feet long.

Founded in 1961, the Rock Aqua Jays Water Ski Club, Inc., is a nonprofit organization, funded solely through donations, fundraising, and sponsorships.

For more information on the Aqua Jays, including a full, up-to-date schedule, visit www.rockaquajays.org.



There are preposterously-posed pyramids aplenty at the Rock Aqua Jays shows on the Rock River in Janesville. (File photo)

Don't bypass Milton

By Jeff Brown
Reprinted from past Lakes Edition

Milton is a historic city located north of Janesville. The city has plenty to offer summer visitors—the Milton House, where runaway slaves hid from bounty hunters on their way north to freedom; the free City of Milton Splash Pad (the perfect place to beat the summer heat); and more than 200 small businesses offering a variety of goods and services.

The state Department of Transportation did Milton no favors in 2013 when it opened the State Highway 26 bypass several miles to the east of the city. The two exits off the bypass that are closest to the city can be confusing.

Don't let that stop you from visiting Milton and all it offers. A new sign alerts motorists southbound on State Hwy. 26 that the County Road N exit leads to Milton. A similar sign alerts motorists heading north on State Hwy. 26

that the State Hwy. 59 exit leads to Milton.

Follow these hassle-free directions and you'll be in Milton in no time.

FROM JANESVILLE: Drive north on State Highway 26. Take the State Highway 59 exit, drive three-quarters of the way around the roundabout, veering to your right out of the roundabout to cross under the bypass, then drive halfway around the next roundabout and veer to your right out of the roundabout to continue west on State Highway 59. Once you reach the intersection with South Janesville Street, you're in Milton. Stay straight or turn left to visit the businesses on the city's south side or turn right to head into downtown Milton.

FROM FT. ATKINSON: Drive south on State Highway 26. Take the County Road N exit, then turn right and drive west on County Road N until you reach the intersection with Milton Road. Turn left on Milton Road and head south until you enter Milton.

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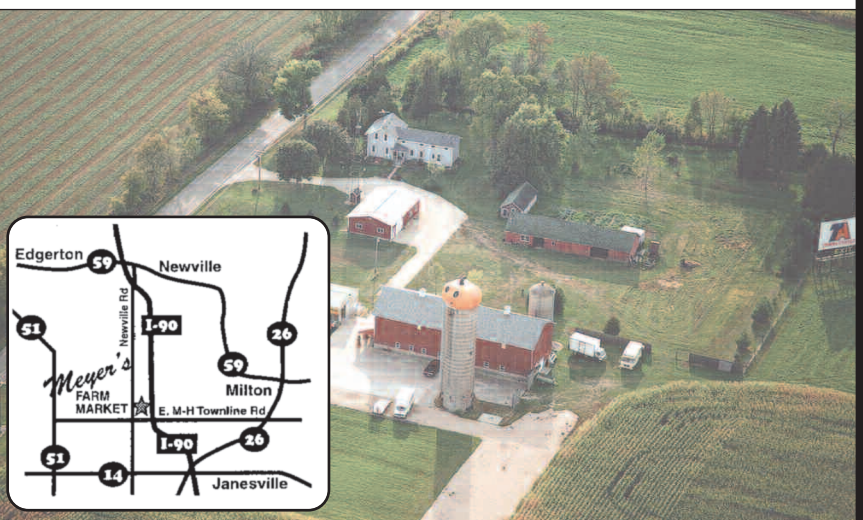
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