

Janesville's Rock Aqua Jays defy gravity with gusto

By Jason Francis
Special to the Lakes Edition

For many decades, the Rock Aqua Jays have been defying gravity with gusto.

And just like the uppermost performer in the ski team's famous pyramids, they have reached the pinnacle of their sport.

The Aqua Jays are considered the most successful water ski show team in the world, and the evidence for that is convincing. During its 57-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 2018 season is scheduled for Sunday, May 27, at 7 p.m.

Barring occasional 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.

Adding to the fun and providing variety each year are the Aqua Jays' annual show themes. Past themes have included "FantaSki Island," "New Kids on the Dock," "Ski-Haw," "Skifeld," "Hatfields & McCoys," and "Mission Ski-Possible."

On the world stage

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. With the help of several Aqua Jays, the USA team has continued (in 2014 and 2016) to capture top honors at the biennial world tournament.

With the help of five Aqua Jays, the USA team will be skiing for a fourth year in September in Ontario, Canada, during the 2018 USA Water Ski Show Team at the fourth International Waterski & Wakeboard Federation Show Ski World Championships.

Four Aqua Jay skiers have been named to the team, including Madi Hagemann, David Rezin, Aragon Luiting and Cathy Luiting. Gerry Luiting, also a member of the Aqua Jays, will serve as a



The Rock Aqua Jays, the most successful water ski team in the world, typically performs on the Rock River in Janesville's Traxler Park twice a week each summer. (File photo)

show director. Also of note this year, the Aqua Jays will be hosting in Traxler Park both the Mercury Open Tournament (June 23) and the Division I National Tournament (Aug. 10-12).

Filling the trophy case

In 2018, 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.

Founded in 1961, the

Rock Aqua Jays Water Ski Club, Inc., is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, funded solely through donations, fundraising, and sponsorships. Its members are volunteers and actually pay dues to belong to the organization. Including active, social and honorary members, more than 175 people are part of the Aqua Jays organization.

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



The Rock Aqua Jays have been an anchor for fun and economic impact in Janesville's Traxler Park for decades. More than 100,000 people attend the team's shows, special events and tournaments each year, resulting in a biennial economic impact of more than \$5 million, according to the team's website. (File photo)

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