

A GATEHOUSE NEWSPAPER

# Journal Star

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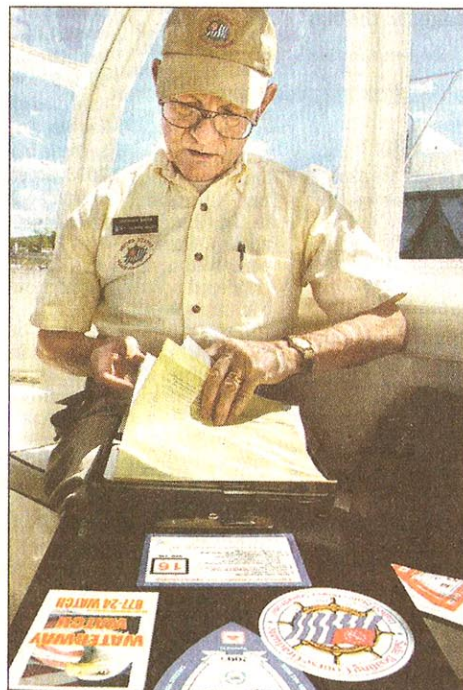
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## CENTRAL ILLINOIS BOATERS GET SAFETY CHECKS BEFORE HEADING ONTO RIVER



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**ABOVE:** Volunteer vessel safety examiner Jonathan L. Yoder from the Illinois Valley Power Squadron finishes up conducting a boat safety check on Paul and Kathy Johnson's 34½-foot Gemini 105Mc catamaran at East Peoria's EastPort Marina on Sunday morning. National Safe Boating Week is today through Memorial Day, and boaters are advised to get their free boat safety checks. **RIGHT:** Yoder looks over his paperwork as he completes the inspection.



# WATER SAFETY

Volunteer examiners double-check vessels as boating season begins

**EAST PEORIA**  
Dozens of boats at East-Port Marina bobbed up and down on the choppy Illinois River on Sunday.

Though it was too windy to sail, Paul and Kathy Johnson of Bloomington wanted to make sure their 34-foot, two-hull catamaran would be ready for the upcoming boating season.

Memorial Day weekend is just around the corner, and the holiday marks the unofficial start of

### TREAT YOUR BOAT RIGHT

► List details Vessel Safety Check program, explains what you should have on board. **Page A8**

summer and usually is the busiest boating weekend of the year. Not by coincidence, National Safe Boating Week runs today through Memorial Day.

Jonathan Yoder, a volunteer vessel safety examiner for the Illinois Valley Power Squadron,

climbed aboard the Johnsons' two-year-old sailboat to perform a free boat safety check.

"We know our boat is safe," Kathy Johnson said. "But maybe he will point out something we overlooked."

Yoder marked off an extensive checklist, making sure the Johnsons' boat was equipped with life jackets, flare guns, fire extinguishers and working navigation lights, to name just a few items.

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## SAFETY

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The Johnsons' boat easily passed the Vessel Safety Check inspection, and Yoder gave the couple a sticker to display on the boat, showing it passed the inspection.

"They'll be left alone by the authorities, and their insurance may give them a break," Yoder said. But the main purpose of the inspection obviously is safety.

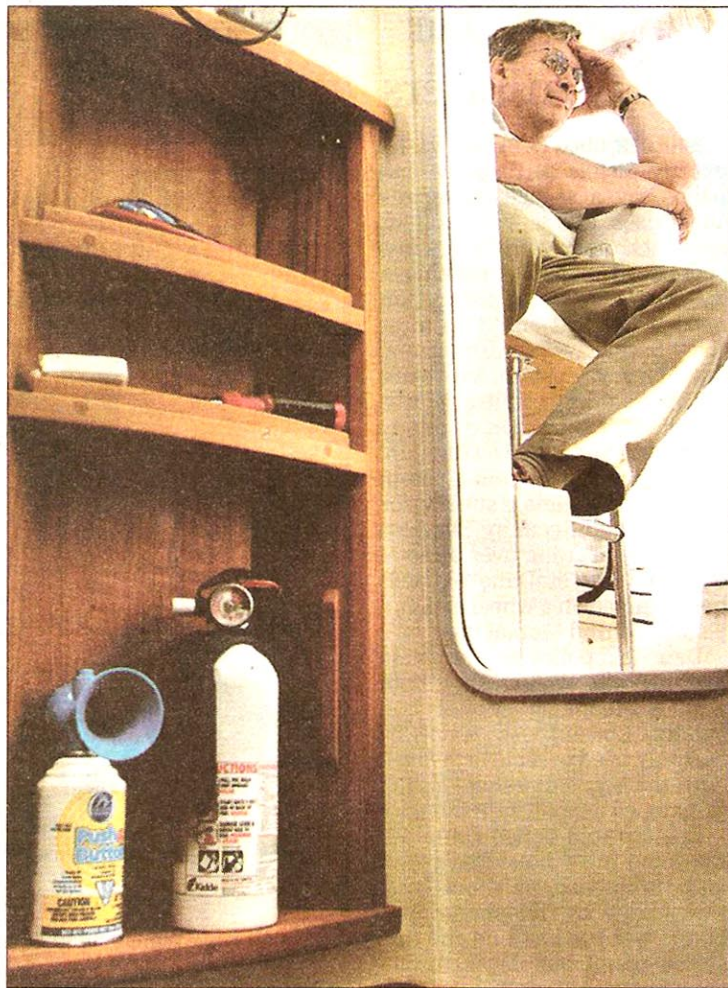
"Our checklist is the most complete way to make sure your boat is equipped," Yoder said. "We keep people safe on the water and keep them up to speed on the requirements to operate a boat safely."

The VSC inspection is free for all boat types and takes no longer than 15 minutes. Yoder and his fellow inspectors don't write tickets. They make sure boats are safe so the "water police" and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources don't ticket boaters for safety violations later, he said. The handful of VSC examiners in central Illinois, all approved by the U.S. Coast Guard, spend a lot of time walking around area marinas offering boat checks and will make themselves even more available this week.

"People think that because they're on water, they don't have anything to worry about," Yoder said.

Last year in Illinois, 13 people died and 57 were injured in boating-related accidents, according to IDNR. Many accidents, Yoder said, involve people falling off boats, often under the influence of alcohol.

"You wouldn't believe how



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TOM MCCARTHY JR./JOURNAL STAR

**Paul Johnson waits as a volunteer vessel safety examiner from the Illinois Valley Power Squadron conducts a boat safety check on Johnson's 34½-foot Gemini 105Mc catamaran at EastPort Marina on Sunday morning. Two things on Yoder's safety checklist were a horn and fire extinguisher, pictured at bottom left.**

many people don't have enough life jackets, but they have plenty of beer," he said.

However, Yoder said things are looking up for boat safety. The number of boating ac-

cidents have decreased by 48 percent in Illinois since 2002, according to an analysis of data recently released by the Personal Watercraft Industry Association.

## Staying safe

The Vessel Safety Check program helps ensure boats are in compliance with boating safety laws while making boaters aware of water-safety issues. The Illinois Valley Power Squadron conducts free safety checks and evaluates boats differently based on size. No citations are written, and the examiner will offer safety and compliance suggestions.

Set up an appointment with Jonathan Yoder, volunteer vessel safety examiner. He can be reached at 712-1622 or by e-mail at [jonathanyoder45@hotmail.com](mailto:jonathanyoder45@hotmail.com). Visit <http://illinoisvalley.uspsd20.org> for more information about boat safety checks.

### Safety checklist:

- Proper display of numbers, registration and documentation
- Personal flotation devices
- Visual distress signals
- Fire extinguishers
- Ventilation
- Backfire flame control
- Sound producing devices
- Navigation lights
- Pollution and trash placard, sanitation devices
- State and local requirements
- Overall vessel condition

"I think people are getting more education than they used to," Yoder said. "I certainly try to inform people during boat safety checks. That's the whole purpose."

For a free boat safety check, call Yoder at 712-1622 or e-mail him at [jonathanyoder45@hotmail.com](mailto:jonathanyoder45@hotmail.com).

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