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Float trips with a higher message  
Ministry helps canoers get close to creation, and their creator.  
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A **canoe** can carry you from point A to point B along the Niangua River in Missouri. It can also carry you closer to God.

That's the concept behind **Living Waters**, a **canoe** ministry started in 2001 by Paul and Julie Ewing of Overland Park.

"Being immersed in creation brings people closer to the creator," Paul Ewing said. "It gives people the opportunity to reflect. Everyone who comes believes that God has brought them there for a reason."

The Ewings got their start in the canoeing ministry by organizing float trips at Olathe Bible Church. They planned youth and family trips for about six years before starting their business.

"What we found is that many organizations had stopped taking **canoe** trips because of the party atmosphere along the river," said Paul Ewing. "So, in starting our ministry, we gained exclusive use of an eight-mile section of the river. That ensures that we keep that section of the river family-friendly."

Named after a Biblical passage in the book of John, **Living Waters** is situated at the Herrick Mill Dam near Camdenton, Mo., about 15 miles from Bennett Springs, a popular site for the partying crowd.

"At Bennett Springs, you'll find drinking, drugs and nudity," Ewing said. "There are lots of arrests and a drowning has even taken place there. You won't find that on our section of the river."

The **canoe** ministry is designed to support other ministries, Ewing said. Hundreds of church members, Boy Scouts and families throughout Johnson County participate in weekend **canoe** trips each summer offered by the Ewings. Ewing estimated about 50 churches in the Kansas City area have participated in the trips.

"We support each ministry's message by providing a family-friendly environment where they can share their message with others," Ewing said. "We do offer a riverside worship service and incorporate a gospel message into each weekend, but our primary purpose is to support other ministries."

Julie Ewing said that **canoe** ministry enables other ministries to have more one-on-one time with their members. "We free them up to be with their members instead of attending to other responsibilities," she said. "For example, we can provide all meals for them, if they desire. They can stay in tents, basic cabins or dorms up to luxury suites."

Westside Family Church in Lenexa is taking its third group **Living Waters** trip in July. Jimmy Ezzell, lay leader and coordinator of the Westside Family Church father-son float trip, said the trip provides an opportunity for father-son bonding. It also provides an opportunity to introduce nonmembers to the church in a relaxed, nonthreatening setting.

"The float trip is an outreach event because nonmembers can attend," said Ezzell. "Men will invite other fathers on the float trip who might not otherwise invite them to attend Sunday school or church."

Ezzell said devotions are included as part of the trip, but that the overall approach to spirituality is casual.

"We've had new dads start visiting the church as a result of the trip," he said. "The number of participants has grown each year. Last year we had about 90 and this year we're closer to 120."

Brian Hilton, Scoutmaster of Troop 282, based at the Leawood United Methodist Church, said 59 Boy Scouts and their mothers and fathers participated in the troop's first **Living Waters canoe** trip in June.

"We enjoyed the beautiful scenery and clear **water**, but what we most appreciated was the family-friendly environment," he said. "There weren't things going on that you see on float trips in other areas."

Hilton said the Scout oath addressing God, country and family is compatible with **Living Water's** ministry. "It goes hand-in-hand with what we're doing," he said. In addition to being a positive outdoor experience, Paul Ewing said the **canoe** ministry provides lay leader training for interested volunteers. "We have volunteers serving as river guides, host families and event directors," he said. "This group has gone on to take on leadership roles in their churches as lay leaders."

The Ewings have partnered with Windermere Resort and Camp Cherry Mountain to provide additional amenities such as cabins, a swimming pool, a climbing wall and indoor recreational activities including pool and ping pong.

Trips are offered from the weekend after Memorial Day through the weekend before Labor Day. Two fall weekend trips are also offered. Call (816) 223-4501 for more information.

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