

Sports

MAKING A SPLASH Kids and adults can take lessons off the Evanston coast with Northwestern University Sailing Center.



Walking on water

More than just a fad, stand-up paddling is perfect for families.

By **Margaret Littman**

Two summers ago, Northbrook's Amy Lyons was looking for a way to occupy her time while her older son took sailing lessons. She met Ian Jacobson, owner of Great Lakes Board Company (see sidebar, right). He suggested she try stand-up paddling, an easy-to-learn hybrid of surfing and kayaking accomplished with a stable paddleboard, a long paddle, a little balance and a body of water.

Even on her initial attempt, "I was able to get a good workout and some peace and quiet just chilling out in the water," Lyons remembers. Before long, "I was going all the time because it was so convenient."

Soon her sons, now 13 and 8, wanted to paddle, too. "This became our major activity of the summer," says Lyons, who biked or played basketball with the boys before discovering stand-up paddling. "It was a fun bonding experience."

A booming sport, stand-up paddling (SUP) is growing particularly quickly in places like Chicago with inland lakes, ponds or rivers (as opposed to coastal regions where it was

already popular). In some cities (though not yet here), SUP yoga has replaced stroller yoga as the go-to activity for moms; small children sit in life vests on the front of the board while Mom does her downward-facing dog on the back.

Plenty of parents such as Lyons like the sport because it's fun for the whole family to do together. In general, kids under eight can ride on Mom or Dad's board; older kids learn to paddle on their own, with parents and/or an instructor safely nearby.

"It helps kids, especially those ages 8 to 13, work with their confidences and insecurities because it allows you to be the captain of your own ship," says Tim Inskip, owner of SUP Guides (subguides.com), a company that offers private SUP and surfing lessons across the country.

"The learning curve is fairly easy. You do not need to be athletic," Jacobson says. While you might tumble into the water once or twice when testing a new move, for the most part, the stable boards and forward movement keep you upright, and it's easy to remount if you do fall. (U.S. Coast Guard regulations require life vests if paddling outside of designated swimming areas.)

Best of all, Jacobson adds, SUP offers "this unique experience to see what it is like to walk on water."

WHERE TO PADDLE

Plug into the stand-up paddling craze along Lake Michigan's shore, which is usually calm enough for beginners and has the bonus of great city views. Class prices include use of equipment.

Great Lakes Board Company
(North Avenue Beach, 773-575-4787,
greatlakesboardcompany.com)

One-hour lessons are \$50. On-board fitness classes are \$25/hour. Rentals alone are \$25/hour; a punch card gives you 20 percent off ten visits. If you get hooked and buy a board (\$700 and up), Great Lakes offers storage, so you don't have to haul it to and from the beach (though the boards are easily carried).

Northwestern University Sailing Center
(1823 Campus Dr, Evanston; 847-491-4142, sailing.northwestern.edu)

Two-hour classes are \$60. One-hour rentals cost \$20/hour during the week, \$25 on weekends. Wet-suit rental (optional) is \$5/day.

Kayak Chicago
(Montrose Beach, 630-336-7245,
kayakchicago.com)

Two-hour classes are \$60. Rentals alone cost \$20/hour, \$80/day. Kayak Chicago recently added on-board yoga and Pilates for adults only.—ML