



Play day for group of invited kayak veterans on the new C.C. whitewater park



Course still closed to public; experienced kayakers invited for demo

Kayakers

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kayakers and tubers in the river and a good-size crowd of onlookers on the banks and nearby walking bridge.

"Look at all the people here watching — you just don't see that (along the river) unless there's a flood," remarked resident Al Whiteside.

Kloberdanz reported kayak groups from Nebraska, Iowa and Wisconsin were invited to the demonstration day, which began around 1 p.m. and lasted past 5 p.m., despite a heavy downpour midway through the afternoon.

"The comments I'm hearing is it's better than they thought it would be for a course in Iowa," said Kloberdanz. "This is coming from people who didn't design the course or were involved in building it, they were just coming to use it."

"And when these guys are telling me this is one of the best courses that they've been on, that's the proof in the pudding that we've done this right."

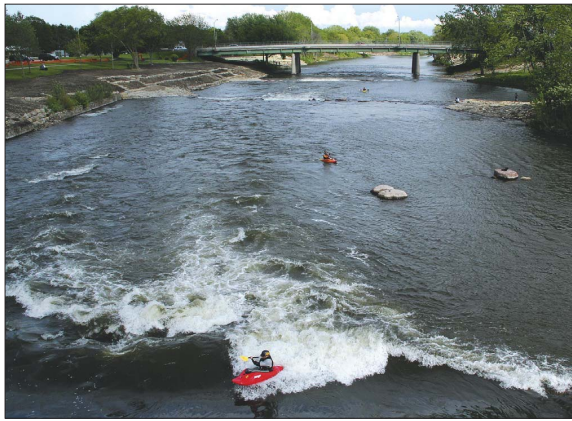
"They love it. Everybody's very happy as far as what they are seeing and saying they are going to be back," remarked Meise. "What we still need to do before the course can be opened is take the words that came from the experienced kayakers and boaters today and get the course to a level in which we feel comfortable in letting everybody out onto the river. Right now these are people who have boated for a long time."

She said already there has been some tweaking of the course based on recommendations from the two experienced kayakers who pitched the project to the Park Board in the first place — Ty Graham and Stavel Weliver from Cedar Falls. They have tested out the various features twice previously.

"One thing that we tweaked on the dam drop is we had a little bit of retention about two weeks ago. We got in there and fixed that so it no longer functions like the beauty dam did where it would hold you in place," explained Meise.

The course is designed, in fact, to flush everything through to a calm pool area at the end, so that nobody gets accidentally hung up in one spot.

"What we saw is the course doing exactly that," said Kloberdanz. "You can



View of the new whitewater park from the walking bridge looking downstream

play in the whitewater features as long as you can hang in there, and then be floated out."

Dave Mable of Iowa Momentum Magazine, based out of Des Moines, was in Charles City Sunday to see the course firsthand.

"This is one of two feature stories we are considering for July," he said of the monthly, free rack-distributed magazine.

"When you hear whitewater park, you picture Class 5 rapids and constant whitewater. This is more 'park and play,' where you park in the feature and play in it. The trend is more wave running like this and you've built some beautiful waves. It's a fun playground. I think Charles City is smart in doing this. I think this investment is going to pay off. I'm very impressed."

Other impressions

James Keyes, of Omaha, Neb., remarked of the whitewater park, "It's excellent. I really like it. There's nothing

like this within an 8-10 hour drive, probably. I know we're going to be back up here."

He said he and other kayaking enthusiasts have known the Charles City course was being built prior to his invitation to try it out Sunday.

"It exceeds my expectations. I really like it. It has so much promise and has a lot of room to grow," Keyes commented.

"I can see tournaments being held here. The whitewater dries up in the play parks in Colorado by mid-summer and I think you'll see people coming in from Colorado. A lot of those guys will drive all the way to Wisconsin to the play parks there."

He called the course an "intermediate level" one for any kind of surfing, "but a novice could run these waves no problem. To actually ride in the waves and play, though, is challenging."

Piper Wall is the lead instructor of the Iowa State University Kayak Club and was up from Ames Sunday.

"I'd heard about it before hand, and so far it has met expectations. Having just done the top bit so far, I love it. This is awesome," she said. "The bottom part looks just as awesome — the course is fluffy and friendly, yet big. It's hard to get all of those in the same combo like this."

Wall explained that there are roughly 40 students involved with the ISU Kayak Club, as well as "a fairly good-size contingent of non-students. This is an experience-based sport and they provide a lot of experience for the students."

"We've been champing at the bit to come out here and try this, but didn't want to get in the way of the construction," she said. "Having this invite — woohoo!"

Asked where the club goes to get on whitewater, she replied, "Here, now! I'm sure we'll have lots of boaters coming up from our group."

"A lot of us head over to the Wausau,

Wis., park, but this is tons closer. That one is more of a race course, while this is more play feature-pool-play feature-pool. I love park and play. It's excellent for working on your skills before going to other places."

Kloberdanz noted that there are many kayak clubs like the ISU one and that "we've got to get them up here."

"One gentleman from Des Moines wants to talk to the Iowa Games people about getting a kayaking event here, a competition. Something they have been trying to add," Kloberdanz added.

Mable said he learned about the new whitewater course while riding on RAGBRAI last summer — which made an overnight stop in Charles City.

"It's impressive. I didn't know what to expect," he said. "I've been watching the progress on the web cam as it was being built. Ever since hearing about it I wanted to be here today."

His magazine, Mable reported, covers endurance and alternative sports in Iowa.

"People know about the Charles City park in circles I run in. I wouldn't say it is top of the conversation yet, but that will change as word starts getting out. There's nothing like it in Iowa. Some rivers like the Boone River have a nice wave, but not features like this."

Keyes said it was well worth the five-hour drive.

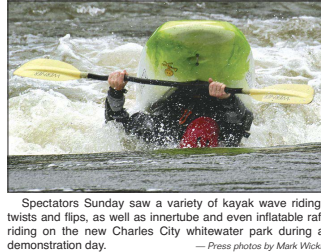
"I had just heard stories about it, but until you actually see it you can't really grasp it," he said of the new park. "I'm coming back to spend two days here next time, not just one."

That's exactly what Kloberdanz and Meise said they want to hear.

"Everything I heard today was positive — there were no significant criticisms," Kloberdanz reported. "One gentleman from Omaha, an avid kayaker, goes to Colorado 4-5 times a year and said our dam drop has the nicest wave of any he's been at in Colorado."

Several people rode inner tubes down the course, as did one man in an inflatable raft.

"Seeing the tubers ride down made a few people realize you don't have to be a kayaker to use the river," Kloberdanz commented. "You can use a paddle board, you can use an inner tube, whatever — just go play."



Spectators Sunday saw a variety of kayak wave riding, twists and flips, as well as innertube and even inflatable raft riding on the new Charles City whitewater park during a demonstration day.

— Press photos by Mark Wickes

