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BOBBY'S BIKE HIKE

Kayak rentals available to all Chicagoans at new ADA accessible boat launch

Bobby's Kayaks offering free kayak rides for people with disabilities this summer

CHICAGO, Ill. -- For many people, springtime in Chicago means a chance to finally get out and enjoy activities like biking along the lakefront, strolling past Michigan Avenue shops, and kayaking on the Chicago River, but such simple adventures can be a major challenge for those with disabilities.

Bobby's Kayaks is stepping up to tackle the hurdles for those with physical challenges by minimizing the obstacles through a new kayak program proposed to launch in June. The "Bring a Special Friend" program will provide a unique chance for residents and visitors with disabilities to float along the Chicago River, marveling at the city's great architecture, for free.

"We've always wanted to give back to the community. It's one of our tenets," said Jeremy Lewno, founder of Bobby's Kayaks and Bobby's Bike Hike, the tour company he created in 2002 and named for his late father who inspired his passion for Travel, Community, Health, and Service.

"We have teamed up with Special Olympics, Chicago Veterans, and other groups serving those with disabilities. We hired a general manager to run the kayak division who has more than five years of experience in adaptive sports and activity. He has been working with people with disabilities for years to get them integrated. And our proposed ADA accessible launch dock will finally offer people with disabilities, as well as seniors who want to stay active, an opportunity to access the Chicago River," explained Lewno.



Bobby's Bike Hike was one of the first companies in Chicago to offer bike tours of the Windy City, and the company expanded to provide walking tours as well in 2010. The popular tour company has recently created a new division that acquired 50 kayaks and access to a boat launch in order to add kayak tours to their offerings for the first time in 2018.

The regular kayak tours will be available to the public starting at \$45 per person for a guided, two-hour adventure or \$30 per hour to rent on your own.

People with disabilities who bring a non-disabled partner to ride with them in a tandem kayak can enjoy a kayak tour for free; the non-disabled partner pays a nominal fee to cover the cost of staff needed to supervise the trip. The kayak rental fee will be waived as part of the "Bring a Special Friend" program.

Lewno is offering the kayaks to groups serving the disabled community every weekday morning, starting with a proposed kick-off event in late June. Bobby's Kayaks has 25 tandem kayaks available to be used by one disabled group per weekday this summer.

"Our proposed dock in Streeterville will be one of the only ADA accessible kayak launches in the city," said Lewno, referring to the Americans with Disabilities Act. "Our launch pad located at the Ogden Slip at 465 N. McClurg Court will have special mechanisms for people with disabilities."

Lewno said he has already received interest from Special Olympics, Chicago Veterans and Access Chicago. He is also working with the Chicago Park District and actively seeking to connect with other organizations that would like to provide a fun and exhilarating adventure to people with disabilities.

"We have been seeing a ton of interest. The park district is working on how they want to make this successful. With that success, then the word will get out, and we expect to get calls from other groups. We'll be able to handle 50 people with disabilities and their partners per day. As we grow, we'll double that number," added Lewno enthusiastically.

"We want to get people of all abilities out there. This allows us to showcase our community and service tenets to our staff and to our customers. That's what our focus is on this project. We're not looking to make any money. We are just hoping to cover our cost for the tour guide," explained Lewno.

Bobby's Bike Hike, which is the sister company of Bobby's Kayaks, has been the No. 1-rated bike tour company in Chicago on TripAdvisor since 2010, after earning thousands of five-star reviews for their unforgettable and unique experiences. The tours provide a healthy way for travelers and residents alike to discover Chicago's fascinating stories, delectable food and drink, and outlandish characters through the charismatic storytelling skills of the city's top guides.

Jeremy Lewno named the company Bobby's Bike Hike after his late father, Bobby Lewno, who operated group bus excursions across North America through his Cosmopolitan Tours firm based in Little Rock, Ark. Bobby's son, Jeremy Lewno, developed the idea of opening his own tour company in 1999 while on a bike tour in Europe during a study abroad semester. With its beautiful lakefront and iconic architecture, Lewno chose Chicago as the base of his company, and he and his wife are now raising their two children in the city.

Bobby's Kayaks will offer kayak rentals and guided kayak tours at bobbysbikehike.com, the same website where Bobby's Bike Hike currently offers bike rentals as well as guided Bicycle, Food, and Walking Tours appropriate for a variety of ages, skills, and interest levels. Every tour promises a glimpse into the history, innovation and culture of Chicago from a truly moving perspective.

