

## **MARK BOZICEVIC**

### **TOURNAMENT SKIER/OFFICIAL**

Mark's competition water skiing began in 1974 when he attended his first tournament as a novice 3 event skier in Men I division. (Copy story of first tournament?)

Mark qualified for his first Regionals in Miami in 1978, his first Nationals in DuQuoin in 1982.

Mark has skied in 30 National Championships, missing only 3.

Mark is a baby boomer, and competition has often been fierce. His age division has often boasted the greatest number of skiers. Mark held the Florida State slalom record in Men III and again in Men VI. Mark has 15 medals in Southern Regional Championships and 4 in Nationals.

Mark joined the Ski Club of the Palm Beaches when he moved to Palm Beach County in 1972. The club was a primarily a show skiing club at that time, so Mark tried to learn all the acts. He was part of the winning club act at a Cypress Gardens event, skiing the role of the unsuspecting tourist who finds a handle and barefoots away. His interest in 3 Event skiing quickly followed as he became President of the club. Mark believed then (and still lives) that you can and should contribute to the tournament in addition to skiing well. He became an AWSA official and quickly began organizing water ski events. He began with local club how-to clinics for skiers like himself that wanted to improve. He tapped into local talent, recruiting anyone who could ski better than others and was willing to share what they knew. He implemented club handicap tournaments to mix new skiers with seasoned experts and to build our club judges and driver pool. The result: lots of skiers and officials got better, stayed in the sport, built the club, and many water ski events ensued.

Mark is currently a Senior 3 Event Judge and has been an official for nearly all of his skiing career. Mark has served as Florida representative on the Southern Regional Council. He also has assisted as an announcer at several national tournaments and maintains a trained driver rating. He was chosen by AWSA for the vital role of Head of Tournament Operations for the 1989 World Championships.

### **LONGEVITY**

AWSA member and competitive skier 1974 - present      SCPB member 1972 - present

Mark first became Ski Club president in 1976. The SCPB constitution provides for officer term limitations, limiting an individual to 2 consecutive years of office. Mark was Ski Club President in 1977, 1984, 1988, 1989, 1994, 1995, 1998, 1999, 2002, 2003. The Club was recognized by AWSA as Club of the Year in 2000 following two years of Mark's presidency. For 30 consecutive years, Mark provided Ski Club leadership as an officer or board member. He served as liaison with Palm Beach County Parks and

Recreation for most of those years, providing a vital role in keeping water skiing in the forefront of Okeeheelee Park.

During this time, Mark brought leadership as working member on the Tournament Organizing Committee for multiple Regionals and Nationals, and one World Championship for which he was also the Head of Tournament Operations. Mark led by example, working hard and building a strong group of club members and friends who built the reputation of exceptional Okeeheelee tournaments. You cannot talk about the remarkable success of Okeeheelee without honoring the talents, efforts, and significant contributions of so many club members over many years. Many times, Mark took the job no one would volunteer for (Case in point: in charge of Parking at many Nationals. Just look at an aerial photo of the 1987 Nationals, imagine working with local county regulations to safely park vehicles, get skiers and equipment to starting docks, vendor vehicles, and of course all the VIPs ). At the request of AWSA, Mark travelled to at least four sites to teach other clubs how to host a Nationals.

## **LANDMARK DEVELOPMENT OF WATER SKIING**

The crowning achievement of Mark's long love affair with water skiing is the establishment of the public competitive water ski facility in Okeeheelee Park. From reviving tournaments on Lake Osborne to building the Okeeheelee water ski site, Mark was dedicated to developing quality sites with public access for water skiing. Over a seven-year period, Mark took the vision of Okeeheelee from an idea to reality, providing a world class site dedicated to 3 event skiing for training and competition, open to the public. He was the voice of the Ski Club of the Palm Beaches in the seven year process to overcome obstacles and to get a long term Okeeheelee contract signed. Mark could have chosen to open his own ski school business as a vendor in Okeeheelee. But he believed in the concept of public and private entities working together for the betterment of all. By design, the contract has always contained no ski club membership requirements, making access available to all who will follow the guidelines. In 2014, there were 145 ski boats registered with Okeeheelee permits.

Along with the site development commitment, Mark established the goal that any Nationals hosted at Okeeheelee be the best tournament of the year for skiers, officials, exhibitors, and for the community. By the second Okeeheelee Nationals in 1987, there were 720 competitors and 25,000 in attendance. The Nationals became a very prestigious, well-attended, profitable event and Okeeheelee became arguably the best water ski venue in the country.

## **INNOVATIONS**

It seemed like wishful thinking to include lights for nighttime skiing in the original Okeeheelee plan. But dreams became reality when lights were installed in 1987. This enabled longer practice hours for all permit holders, and some of the most exciting competition events in years to come. With an active club that included many skiers, judges, boat drivers and tech gurus, Okeeheelee became a place to test and to implement improvements in the sport. The site became the place for college skiers to come for spring break training, many people came from other states and foreign countries to ski year round. Innovation followed. For example, it was too expensive to maintain all our public courses with round

buoys. So we began using the cylinder shaped boat guides and lobbied to have them accepted for the boat path. We became the first site to run 3 or 4 Nationals events simultaneously. We dug a dedicated practice lake for the Worlds, changing the profitability of hosting the Nationals. We eliminated dual boats in long events by running one event on two lakes simultaneously. We televised the Nationals. While President, Mark led the Club in putting on the very first Pro Tour in 1984 and the 1994 Festival of Champions (Nationals Championships for 3 event, kneeboard, and barefoot divisions of AWSA). He was also part of the organization of the First US Open in 1986, the 2001 America's Cup Pro Tour. Mark implemented three Super Swami Slalom Shootout events immediately following the Nationals. This event was open to national medalists with equalized scoring to determine a national slalom champion.

## PERSONAL ODYSSEY

Pursuit of fun/friends

Lake Osborne days

Seed of idea to become a competitive water skier

Dream of becoming Open skier

Search for quiet waters

Hilton site, land of alligators and Clorox jugs

Pilgrimage south to McGinnis'

Okeeheelee—from dream to reality

## TIMELINE

1972 Move to WPB

1973 Lake Osborne, SCPB show team

1976 President of SCPB, return of 3 event tournament skiing to SCPB

1982 March—Okeeheelee Park ski site opens



## BECOMING A TOURNAMENT SKIER

### First tournament

It was Memorial Day, circa 1973. Mark, Al, and Gregg head to Merritt Island for a 1 round 3 event 3 day tournament. The \_\_\_ entry fee included 3 lunches and a cookout.

The guys towed Al's G3 outboard (thinking that everyone brought their own boat as part of their equipment). Al had a cool O'Brien ski, Mark and Gregg shared a Cut 'n Jump slalom. They all shared a pair of Cypress Gardens Trickmaster skis. At the tournament, they bought a pair of blue wood Cypress Gardens rampmasters. They took the binders off the trick skis to put on the jumpers, attaching them with carriage bolts.

It was their first tournament, so they entered the Novice Division. In the slalom competition, Al went out at 30 mph and fell between buoys 1 and 2. Gregg and Mark had to outdo him, so they both went out at 32 mph. They scored the same. In the jump competition, only Gregg rode a jump away. Prior to that tournament, the guys had only ridden over a jump on trick skis.

Not discouraged by their initial performances, it was back to Palm Beach County with determination to become real competitive water skiers.

### LAKE OSBORNE DAYS 1970s

Prior to our arrival in Palm Beach County, Rob Shirley and Art Cozier had run a ski school on Lake Osborne in the pre-MasterCraft days.

We became the oh-so-proud owners of a red, silver, and blue metal-flake California jet boat. It had a 455 Oldsmobile engine, a Berkley jet drive, and it was fast. We thought we had the coolest boat on the lake, but among the Ski Club of the Palm Beaches, we were immediately classified as Weekend Wallies. We ran that boat out of gas several times a week, trying to learn to slalom, trick, and jump. Just driving the boat in a course or trying to get the boat to plane at a reasonable place was a constant challenge, most often Joy's trial-by-fire learning curve as a boat driver.

In the 1970s, the club was known as a show skiing club. Everyone met at Lake Osborne on weekends to practice. We kept the equipment trailer in our yard, full of ropes and skis and costumes.

Mark was learning to ski all 3 events as well as mastering barefoot skills as he learned to do mixed doubles and the very frightening triple jump, maybe a helicopter, over and under (hoping to not lose his head). Then came the "what if" that resulted in Mike Ryyty, Traci Alvaroe, and Ed Koorneef successfully executing the barefoot pyramid. in the club's entry at Cypress Gardens club show competition, Mark played the innocent tourist who picks up the ski handle and then barefoots off the beach.

In 1976, Mark became SCPB President. With two-year term limits mandated by the club constitution, Mark served as President in 1977, '84, '88, '89, '94, '95, '98, '99, 2002 and 2003, and as board member

in the in-between years when not president. He developed a leadership style that was based on the many skills and interests of club members working together to do something fun and maybe spectacular. As soon as Mark gained a few slalom skills, he started offering clinics for beginners at Lake Osborne. He was only running maybe 32 mph long line in the slalom course, but he was committed to teaching others. He got Russ Stiffler and the Woofendens to teach tricks, and had some instructors for jumping as well (Bobby Shields? Bill Caldwell?)

Mark decided it was time for the club to return to its former 3 event tournament roots. A floating course with suspicious accuracy was installed in the main jump lake. The north end of Lake Osborne was closed for boating, but we were required to let boats go through from the boat ramp. The judges arrived for this first tournament: the Johnstons, Statas, Switzers and Art Cozier from central Florida, the Longos and Lisenbeys from Miami. We were in awe of these officials who actually knew what they were doing. The conditions weren't great for a tournament, and before long we were looking for a better site.

The club had a slalom course in the middle lake. This became the training ground for the McClintock family and numerous Canadians, the Italian team, Russ Stiffler, Mike Ferraro, various northerners including but certainly not limited to Cecil Monnier and Ron Ricketts. The practice slalom course was challenged by resident Mr. Duxbury who rowed his canoe out to sit in the course so skiers couldn't use it. It became a challenge to get good ski conditions. A lot of boats used the lake and the connecting canals. So we went in search of quieter, happier waters.

The Ski Club had been gifted a lot on Lake Osborne next to the Anchor Inn. The water was too shallow to allow for lake access, but it had a nice lake view. The lady who donated it was married to a man who invented an additive for Shell gasoline. Eventually this property was sold and the money helped fund the beginning of the Okeeheelee ski site.

#### THE AIRPORT (now Hilton) SITE

We got permission from the airport authority to install a ski course in the small lake which had a boat ramp that boaters used to access the canals along what became I 95. Harold Yount stood on Mark's shoulders in nasty silt and sediment to install screw anchors, aided by Johnnie Tieche and Skip Herbert. This marked the beginning of our dumpster diving days. We couldn't afford real buoys, and replacing them was a daily event. The ski day began at dawn before work. First you drove the boat back and forth a few times. This was known as the alligator sweep. The first skier got in the water, searched for buoy ropes with feet in the silt, reattached missing Clorox jugs, got in the boat to remove leeches, then skied, went to work, the last skier with the latest work start time took boat home. This routine was repeated after work. After the last ski run and usually in the dark, it was time to visit dumpsters at laundromats to find Clorox jugs for the next day. We considered ourselves lucky to have a place to ski.

We held a few tournaments there, but there were so many imperfections. The course was too far from the shore for judges and spectators. There were sandspurs, pleasure boats going to and from the canals, no shade. An enormous alligator was caught and removed after interrupting aircraft traffic by sunning on the runway. Surely we could find a better tournament site.

## McGINNIS BUTTERFLY LAKE, Ft. Lauderdale

In the late 1970's, early 80's, a ski club member achieved the ultimate dream: a private ski lake. John McGinnis was kind enough to invite us to use Butterfly Lake for tournaments. California had Dr. Horton's model. None of us in the ski club had that kind of money or opportunity or even vision. So we began our pilgrimages south. Some learned to be officials, others became drivers. After all, when the family skis (some all 3 events), you're on site for the duration. So we chose to be useful and our judging careers began.

This began our travelling years. Most weekends we would drive to the single site in Florida where there was a tournament. They were all 1 round, 3 event. Miami was hands down the WOW site: 5 finger canals, wind protection, huge trees everywhere, cookouts with Leon Campbell. Lakeland had Lake Hollingsworth (where our car was stolen then recovered), Orlando had Lake Ivanhoe. We drove to Space Coast, Ft. Myers, and eventually Groveland hit the ski scene with the amazing SuperStars tournament. We went to Regionals in Miami, Montgomery AL, Eastman and Milledgeville in GA, and of course, Paducah KY at the far north of a huge region. Eventually Mark got the treasured, long sought-after double EP rating and qualified for Nationals. We journeyed to DuQuoin, IL and to Jay Bennett's in LA. DuQuoin was the most frequent Nationals site. The club was so hospitable, but the lake area was limited and the site was far from hotels and airports. The site of the state fairgrounds, it was remote, in the midst of corn fields. There was one lake for slalom and jump, a short second adjoining lake for tricks. You couldn't run slalom and tricks at the same time, and there were many 3 event skiers. Jump was the last event. Rain delays caused things to run late. Our club Sr. Men (oldest division at that time) competed for the national title in the dark with car headlights trained on the jump ramp. We returned to West Palm thinking that surely there was a way to make the Nationals a more prestigious tournament. It became Mark's conviction that the Nationals should be the best tournament of the year for skiers, officials, and sponsors. Get ready, Okeeheelee, we have BIG plans.

## OKEEHHEELER DREAM

One of the great things about water skiing is that the membership represents a wide variety of people from many backgrounds, careers with diverse talents. Pinky Yount had a lot of experience working with county and state political agendas, and she brought us the first glimmer of what was going to happen in central Palm Beach County. The Palm Beach County Parks and Recreation Department, headed by John Dance at that time, had a master plan for a few large regional parks to provide extensive opportunities for recreation in addition to the many smaller county and municipal parks. Mark and Pinky felt like we should pursue getting competitive water skiing included in the central regional park. In 1973, the county had purchased 754 acres for what would become Okeeheelee Park. They added an additional 69 acres the following year. The first site plan proposed ball fields, a community center, a cultural center, an amphitheater, an arboretum, and areas for tennis, horses, and boating. Every sport imaginable wanted a spot in Okeeheelee, and everyone had to go through the Okeeheelee Citizens Advisory Board. We began attending their meetings in 1977 and immediately discovered that we could not hope to compete with the professional presentations of those wanting in, everything from a velodrome to an outdoor

concert arena. The only boating to be allowed must be passive, no polluting engines with nasty noisy, disturbing the pristine beauty of this new park. Most people would have given up at this point, so negative was the reception to our water ski proposal. However, Mark continued to listen to their arguments and to counter the negativity with information and a plan for positive impact on the park.

We prepared a presentation, requesting three lakes. Water Management and an Advisory Board environmentalist were staunchly opposed. Club member Jerry Mandello talked with Dr. James Brandon, Chairman of the Advisory Board. Others did research. AWSA helped with statistics that countered arguments to the noise and pollution possibilities. We took the environmentalist out in the boat and erased his objections. Eventually he became so convinced that he offered to bring his diving equipment to help us install the courses. We had bought one of the early portable video cameras, you know, the kind with the bulky recorder attached to a tv camera. We used this emerging technology to make a demonstration video that showed the Advisory Committee how quiet the boats were and how the boat wake did not erode the shore line. While this technological presentation helped considerably, the answer was still NO. Water was to be shared, and boating mayhem was not something they wanted to invite. So Mark persuaded them to consider the water a playing surface, like a baseball field or a tennis court. It needed to be an area with one specific designation for use, and we were requesting a world class competitive tournament water ski site. While this argument was finally accepted, approval was again withheld.

During this time, Mark talked to the engineers who were determining shore lines. Luckily, he convinced them to replace their idea of esthetic variations to the shore with the straight, sloped shore lines conducive to good water skiing conditions. Mark presented an ambitious plan of docks and judging towers which the Ski Club would fund, build, and then donate to the County. This was a novel idea, requiring money that we would have to find. The three-phase plan included lights on one course, a dream that few thought ever would be possible. It was to be a world class site like no other, all in a public park. The roadblocks were many. When one issue was resolved, another negative stood in the way. Years of negotiations passed. This was a park for all of Palm Beach County, the Advisory Board felt that it could not be reserved for a private ski club. So the answer was still NO.

Re-enter Pinky Yount. With her connections, she discovered that some state powerboating funds had been used in the digging of the Okeeheelee lakes. We quietly insisted that this was a reason they were obligated to allow some kind of power boats in Okeeheelee. We proposed that the site would not be exclusive to our ski club members, but that it would be exclusive to competition boats pulling competition practice and events. A permitting process was discussed and eventually approved. To this day, there are no club membership requirements to obtain an Okeeheelee permit. It is open to anyone who agrees to follow the site rules.

The Club presented goals of prestigious tournaments we hoped to host: state, regional, national, and world tournaments for amateurs as well as professional water ski events. Approval for allowing competitive water skiing on 3 lakes in Okeeheelee Park was finally granted in 1983.

The next unexpected hurdle was that there was zero money allocated for a boat ramp. We had approval to ski, but there was no way to put a boat in the water. So the Ski Club financed the first boat ramp. In

December of 1982, the Marcinkoski family graded the ramp area, Sid Morgan's crane lifted materials. Ski Club members donned wetsuits and put down a mat followed by interlocking blocks held together with stainless steel cables. We had a boat ramp.

On August 9, 1983, Ski Club Vice President Joe Godfrey signed the first contract between the Ski Club of the Palm Beaches and the Palm Beach County Commission, allowing competitive water skiing in Okeeheelee for a period of 20 years. This contract was amended in 1999 and extended for 15 years. The contract is continually renewed for a limited time period, and the ski club works hard to maintain a good relationship with Palm Beach County Parks and Recreation. The county honors our efforts to host large events that bring people to Palm Beach County, particularly in the off season summer months.

By October of 1984, President Mark Bozicevic reported that the Ski Club of the Palm Beaches had generated funds and/or donated labor and materials to provide: 1 boat ramp, 11 docks, 1 ski jump ramp, 2 slalom courses, 3 large judging towers, 10 small judging towers, 4 jump meter stands, labor to plant trees for shade along the north/south course with 3 tree fertilization applications. All of this was done by the Ski Club and donated to Palm Beach County. Estimated material cost was \$38,000. Estimated labor donated was 3,000 hours. The Ski Club of the Palm Beaches put on seven tournaments in the 1984 season, including the Southern Regional Championships and the very first professional water ski tour with an attendance of about 5,000. It was a great beginning.

In 1987, permission was granted to allow the Ski Club to investigate lighting the east/west slalom course to allow for night skiing. Research was done, and the lights were installed. We are getting ready to invite the world to Okeeheelee. We might need another lake to enlarge the venue.

A strong Nationals team was in place to host the 1986, 1987, 1988 National Championships at Okeeheelee, as well as the 1989 World Championship. The 1987 Nationals and U. S. Open had 720 competitors with a final day count of 25,000 in attendance.

## April Coble letter of recommendation

I would like to drop a little note as a recommendation for Mark Bozicevic for the Award of Distinction.

I started skiing at Okeeheelee Park in West Palm Beach, FL during the winter of 1987. I made the Jr. World team that was to compete in Australia the following March. My parents, sister, and I would drive the 600 miles from NC in our motorhome, every weekend. We kept a boat in storage and would drive through the night Friday, arrive Saturday morning, ski Saturday and Sunday until lunch, put the boat back in storage and head back home. Mark and Joy not only offered for me to fly down and ski with them if my parents could not drive me, but they offered for me to live with them for the winter. I would get to ski with them and Joy would take me to the high school where she taught every day. My parents would not let me move South so young but I did eventually take them up on the offer 25 years later when I would go to FL weekly to get ready for Moomba Masters in Australia. Not only were Mark and Joy the pioneers of Okeeheelee, they are amazingly giving people who I call my Florida parents. I am proud to have had their help in my skiing career and credit some of my summer success to my winter training.

My association with Mark Bozicevic traces back to 1978 at Lake Osborne, in Lake Worth, Florida, where he and Joy, his wife, taught me how to slalom ski, which did not come to me naturally. My bride, Marcy, had learned to ski as a teenager. My name is Jerry Mandello and I am nominating Mark Bozicevic for The American Water Ski Association Award of Distinction.

I met Mark through Dr. Stewart Woofenden, who sent me to Lake Osborne, where Mark hosted water ski clinics on Tuesday nights. I was a pharmaceutical sales representative at the time, which is how I knew Dr. Woofenden. He took me into his private office where on the wall was a great photograph of him waterskiing. He was in his late 40's at the time and I was only 28 years old and was very impressed with that photo. It was then that I decided that I wanted to be as physically fit as he was.

Many longtime friendships were formed at Lake Osborne. Being a novice at the sport of water skiing, I strived to learn everything I could from watching some very talented skiers there. I also soon learned that Mark Bozicevic was a serious "pipe dreamer", whose philosophy was to "live your dreams". He, along with Russ Stiffler, Mike Ferraro, Ron Ricketts and the McClintocks were true water ski "junkies". Joel McClintock even went on to win the World Water Ski Championships in 1979!

This group of very talented athletes lured me into the water ski world and I attempted my new challenge under Mark's training and tremendous patience. Because of his instruction, I qualified for the Regionals. That was very exciting for me, as I hadn't competed in sports since high school wrestling.

Okeeheelee Park is where the real story begins. There I became involved with Ski Club of the Palm Beaches, which hosted ski tournaments in Lake Osborne, the Airport Lake, which later belonged to the Hilton Hotel, and the McGinnis ski site, Butterfly Lake, in Ft. Lauderdale. After participating in the Regionals in Montgomery, Alabama, a "mudhole" where only one event could be run at a time, I began to realize what the water ski world needed—and Okeeheelee Park was the answer! This was Mark Bozicevic's dream—to create an ideal water ski site, where three events could be run consecutively.

Dealing with Palm Beach County Parks and Recreation Department was our big roadblock. This involved countless hours and meetings with first John Dance and then Dennis Eshleman, and the ever changing Board of County Commissioners, presenting our ideas for Okeeheelee. I did have one personal connection, Dr. James Brandon, who was Chairman of the Advisory Board for the park. I frequently called on him, as a pharmaceutical sales rep, but our conversations did not revolve around prescription drugs, but rather Okeeheelee Park, which was Dr. Brandon's "baby". I remember when he informed me that the Native American name of the park means "quiet waters". Later, at the end of the long journey to host the World Water Ski Championships, Dr. Brandon was extremely happy and proud of what Ski Club of the Palm Beaches had accomplished.

With Mark Bozicevic's persistence, leadership and determination to bring water skiing to Okeeheelee Park, it did finally become a reality. It was a long, slow process, but the club finally got the big break. Thanks to Pinky Yount, who had years of experience working with county and state boards, we discovered the loophole that we needed. We proposed that water skiing in the



park would be open to the public for competition and practice. This would not be an exclusive site for Ski Club of the Palm Beaches. We would host large tournaments in the summer months, during south Florida's "off season", which we estimated would attract over 1,000 skiers and their families, filling local hotels and restaurants, and generating a lot of revenue for Palm Beach County. Our dream was to eventually host the Water Ski Regionals, Nationals and possibly even the World Championships.

We finally got approval and were off and running, except that we had to use ski club money to buy and build everything we needed. We also had to provide our own labor. However, there were many dedicated club members who were determined to see this through. When I reflect on the many weekends, totaling thousands of manhours, that we put into our "dream site", I wonder how we ever found the time and energy to complete this massive project! Our stumbling blocks were not gone, however, because we were required to build the site to Palm Beach County and American Water Ski Association specifications. What a hat trick! We were one united team on a mission with a clear vision—we were all on Boz's Vision Train.

Then, in December 1982, our club built a unique boat ramp at Okeeheelee Park. By anchoring stainless steel cables and stringing interlocking cement blocks together, one at a time, we completed this special ramp to county specifications. Next we began installing slalom ski courses and judges towers, which were built around and hoisted up on telephone poles. This presented quite a challenge, as we had to sink the poles deep into the water. We then proceeded to build docks for the boats, while maneuvering the mass of sandspurs along the shore. We would "break" by taking turns at ski sets. This three-event ski site finally became a reality in 1984, when our club hosted the first Professional Water Ski Tour—wow! The gods and goddesses of water skiing came to Okeeheelee Park and Boz's "pipe dream" had come to fruition! We watched the best skiers in the world of water skiing. During the same year, we also hosted the Southern Regional Championships.

During 1985 and 1986 I was president of the ski club, while we continued to improve the site and won the bid with AWSA to host the US Water Ski Nationals and Open Championships. We were still completing construction on the main clubhouse on the eve of the Nationals. While trying to finalize projects on the site, I signed many checks, having to borrow money from ski club members on short term loans. We successfully hosted the Nationals in 1986 and went on to host US Water Ski Nationals and US Open Championships the next two years. Our club ultimately even hosted the Water Ski World Championships in 1989!

Yes, Mark Bozicevic's dream was twelve years in the making. Little did he know how his leadership would affect water skiers all over the world. Many have come to ski, train and compete at Okeeheelee Park. Thank you, Mark Bozicevic, not only from me, but from every water skier who has had the opportunity to ski at this world class water ski site.



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The Official Magazine of the Palm Beach County Sports Commission



# FACILITIES

## BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE: PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

"If you build it, they will come," was the famous line to the popular movie *Field of Dreams*, but for many communities the question is not "if" you build it, but "how" can you build it? While facilities remain the drawing card to bring major sporting events to any community, public dollars are stretched thin. Who will pay...and who benefits?

"The public-private partnership is the only workable solution," says Joe Casale, former member of the County Arena Task Force and a board member of the Palm Beach County Sports Commission. "The goal is to try to make a deal where both sides leave the table feeling good. That's the challenge. It doesn't work when one side foots all the costs."

In Palm Beach County, there are already many examples of public and private entities working together to produce outstanding facilities that are enjoyed not only by the taxpayers, but by visitors who compete at the venues.

To see how public-private partnerships are prospering in Palm Beach County, one needs to look no further than the 1,000-acre Okeeheelee Park in West Palm Beach where the water skiing venue is one of the top competition sites in the world, its BMX course is drawing new competitions, and its three-year-old 27-hole golf course is also a success.

At Okeeheelee's water skiing venue, the County Parks and Recreation department formed a partnership with the Ski Club of the Palm Beaches that has yielded smiles across the board.

"The taxpayers won out," says Dave Lill, the county aquatics supervisor who has been with the department for 20 years. "We dredged and designed the lakes and the Ski Club has built all the structures....docks, slalom courses,



judging towers. We come in and move bleachers, add electrical services."

The facility, which has been expanded by the Ski Club to include five water ski courses, regularly hosts the national championships. At last July's Championship, 968 skiers from all 50 states competed; the event poured more than \$1.4 million into County coffers.

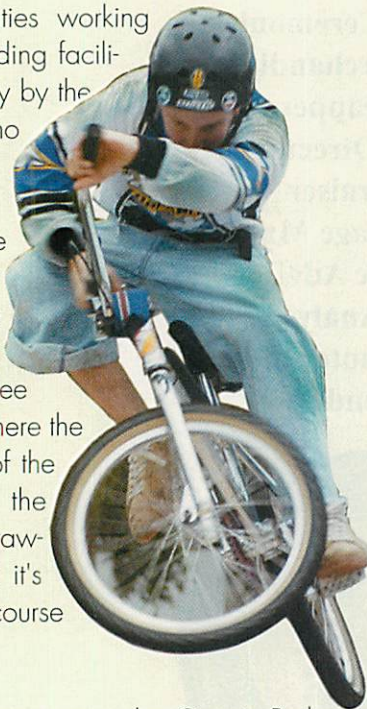
"The situation is a win-win one because we were able to sit down and meet each other's needs," says Mark Bozicevic, president of the Ski Club. "In the late '70s we had a real need for a competitive ski area. We met to see what would fit in with their idea of boating in the park. We struck a deal. The Ski Club has totally developed and maintained the site since 1981."

The Club takes all entry fees from its competitions and puts them back into the site. In the last few years a building for registration and changing rooms has been added. Lights have been installed for night skiing.



**Ski Club President Mark Bozicevic at Okeeheelee Park**

"It is the best site in the whole world," says Bozicevic, who has been a member of the Ski Club's board of directors since 1975. "The water conditions alone make it the best site, but we have more to offer in Palm Beach County-





# FACILITIES

we have airports, hotels, the Ski Club to facilitate the maintenance and make it happen. What we have now is pristine. It's without a question the best."

Here's the kicker. Included in the contract between the County and Ski Club is the provision that the public has access to the world-class facilities. Anyone who has a tournament boat approved by the National Water Skiing Association can get a permit to water ski at Okeeheelee.

"Other government agencies have worked with private enterprises, but then the facility becomes off limits to the public," says Lill. "Palm Beach County didn't want that. We wanted the parks accessible to everyone."

"The majority of people who ski (at Okeeheelee) are club members," says Bozicevic. "You don't have to join the club, but you do have to have a tournament boat and understand the rules of the ski course. It's a quality training area out there. It's not a lake-it's like a tennis court or basketball court. There are very controlled conditions so that skiers can practice and be competitive at the national and world levels."

Okeeheelee's bicycling (BMX) facility is organized differently, but it still works out to a public-private partnership. The Okeeheelee BMX Parents Council Association, a non-profit organization, leases the property from the County.

"It's a public-private cooperation to the degree that they are non-profit," says Jon Herrick, director of recreation for the Palm Beach County Parks and Recreation Department. "They've made all the improvements except a few like fencing and landscaping. It's been working pretty well. It looks like a popular venue."

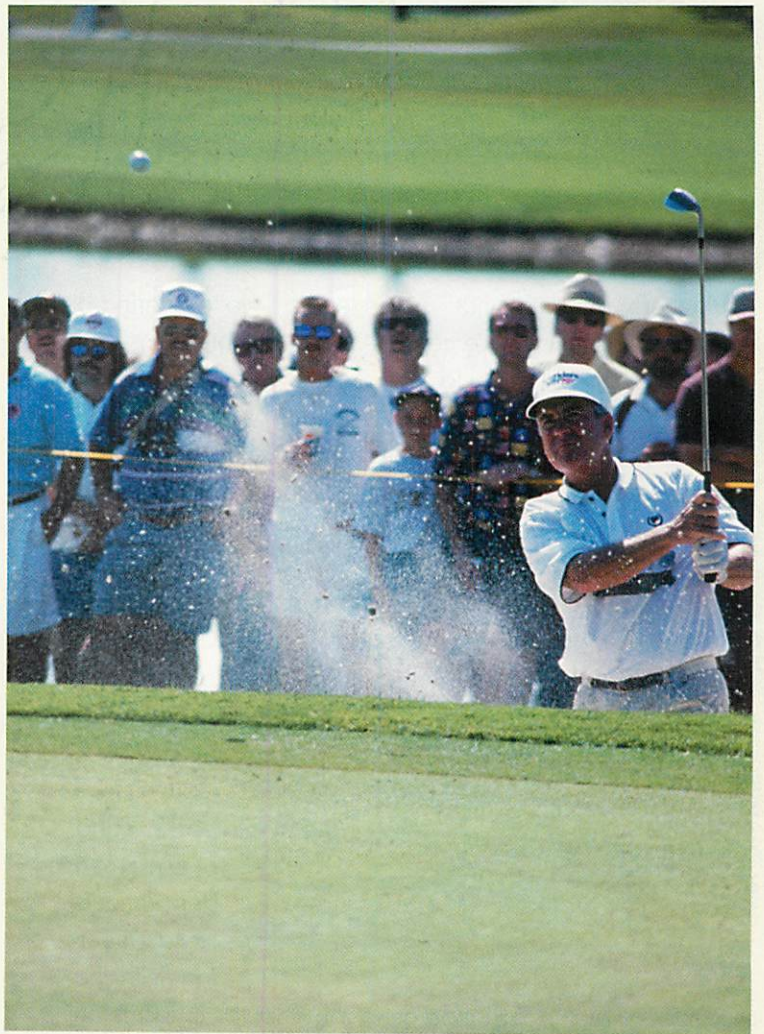
County residents who want to use the BMX facility must first become a member of the bicycle club, which charges a small annual fee to cover insurance costs. Club membership is open to anyone, provided they are properly dressed and their bicycle checks out to National Bicycle League standards.

"We built the track and maintain it so that all age groups can ride it and find challenges on different parts of the track," says Ed Saltzman, president of the Club. "The

money we raise through dues, race entry fees and concessions goes back into the facility."

"They (the club) are essentially providing a service for us," says Herrick. "We look at it as another way to meet our service demand. That's how we operate. If there's a need in the area, we look at all the options. We can look to private industry."

"Our volunteers are the backbone of our program," says Saltzman. "They put their heart and soul into this. Our ridership has grown-we're one of the premier tracks in the country. We're pushing the limit with our volunteers to have it opened three days a week."



Herrick points out that a different combination of the private-public partnership is also working quite nicely at Okeeheelee's golf course. County staff provides the management staff that collects revenue and facilitates all its



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# a One-Ski

## Wellington's Mark Bozicevic Put

STORY AND PHOTOS BY GREG PERREAULT

At 53, Mark Bozicevic is a nationally ranked, medal-winning water skier, but he's most proud of providing a local place where others can enjoy the sport he loves.

"Probably the thing I'm most proud of is being responsible for water skiing at Okeeheelee Park," said Bozicevic, a 22-year Wellington resident.

Bozicevic has been honored with a bronze medal for his specialty, slalom — negotiating a course on a single ski — at the Goode National Water Ski Championships twice, in 1990 and 2000. He has also served more than 10 terms as president of the Palm Beach Ski Club — more frequently than any other member. Bozicevic is currently training for the 2005 Goode National Water Ski Championships coming this month to Okeeheelee Park, but the event wouldn't be taking place there at all if not for his efforts. ►

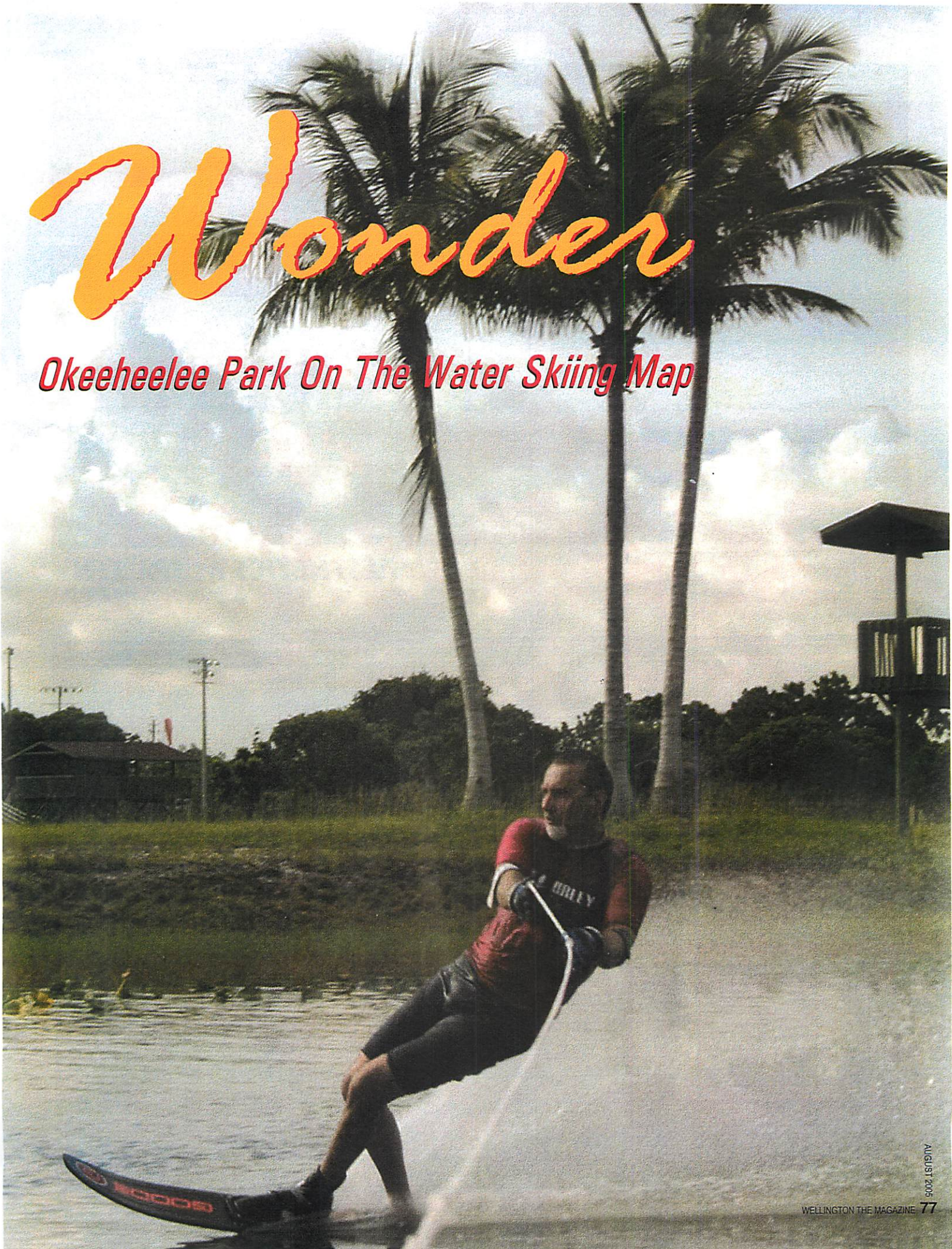
Wellington's  
Mark Bozicevic  
with his slalom ski.

(Opposite) Water skiing champ  
Mark Bozicevic in action.



# Wonder

*Okeeheelee Park On The Water Skiing Map*





## A One-Ski Wonder

*'He perseveres,' said Joy of her husband's water skiing efforts.*

*'He thinks about it, dreams about it and he surrounds himself with other people who do it well. He spends time with beginners, so he's always thinking about the basics.'*

Thirty years ago, no one was water skiing at Okeeheelee Park. At that time, the park was just a collection of sandpits left over from when shell rock was excavated for the Florida's Turnpike road bed, according to Jerry Mandelo, former president of the Palm Beach Ski Club.

Bozicevic approached the Okeeheelee Advisory Board in 1976 with the idea of putting in water ski lakes, but the idea was rejected. "However, we didn't take no for an answer," Bozicevic recalled.

As spokesman for the Palm Beach Ski Club, he went to all the board's meetings and took several of its members skiing. He and other club members ex-

plained the safety measures they'd take, and convinced them that it would be economically sound to have a national water-skiing location in Palm Beach County, since a national competition would raise demand for hotels, food and transportation. One by one, board members began to warm up to the plan.


The Palm Beach Ski Club agreed to completely outfit the lakes with boat ramps, jump ramps, docks and judging towers in return for the use of the lakes. Before long, three lakes were approved. It took seven years of construction and landscaping before the lakes were ready, Bozicevic said. Two more were added in the early 1990s to keep up with demand. ►

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## A One-Ski Wonder

Since 1984, the ski club and Okeeheelee Park have hosted five southern regional competitions, eight national competitions, one world championship and three professional tournaments. "He gave this water-ski site to the world," Mandelo said. "The young man had vision — putting Okeeheelee on the world water-ski map. Pipedream come true."

Although Bozicevic has his own private lake to ski on, he prefers to ski at

Okeeheelee. "Okeeheelee Park is probably the best place in the world to ski," he said.

But Bozicevic also enjoys helping other skiers learn. Mandelo learned how to slalom under Bozicevic's teaching.

"People often ask me to ride the boat with them and show them what they can do to improve," Bozicevic said. "It helps me improve, too."

His wife Joy said Bozicevic began water skiing in humble fashion, recalling a competition before they got married in which he fell at the first buoy in the slalom course. At the time, she didn't think he'd ever be good at the sport, but now he's one of the best in the nation.

"He perseveres," said Joy of her husband's water skiing efforts. "He thinks about it, dreams about it and he surrounds himself with other people who do it well. He spends time with beginners, so he's always thinking about the basics."

In his professional life, Bozicevic is a regional vice president with Primerica, helping families plan their financial future. He is also a board member of the Wellington Chamber of Commerce.

Bozicevic can't say for sure why water skiing is so important to him, but he realizes that it has shaped his life. He

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Water skiing champ Mark Bozicevic with his wife Joy.

"To be the weekend date, I had to learn how to water ski or drown trying," Joy laughed. "I learned to ski against all odds because I'm not athletic."

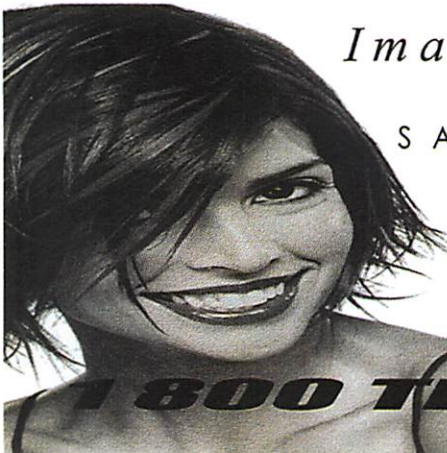
However, she's grown to love the sport, and even enters competitions herself.

"He's so involved in that — if we didn't do that together, we wouldn't spend much time together," Joy said. "I'm not really a competitive person, but water skiing is a great sport. You can keep competing until you can't hold the handle anymore."

Bozicevic said one reason he likes water skiing is because he doesn't really compete against others, but against himself. The playing field is pretty level in water skiing — whether a guy wins or loses is up to him, Bozicevic said. The sport stands apart from most because a skier doesn't gain an advantage by being a certain size, speed or strength, he noted. ►

grew up in Ft. Lauderdale and dreamed of water skiing, and when the opportunity to do so arrived in 1972, he be-

came wrapped up in the sport. Joy recalls learning how to ski to spend time with him when they first met.




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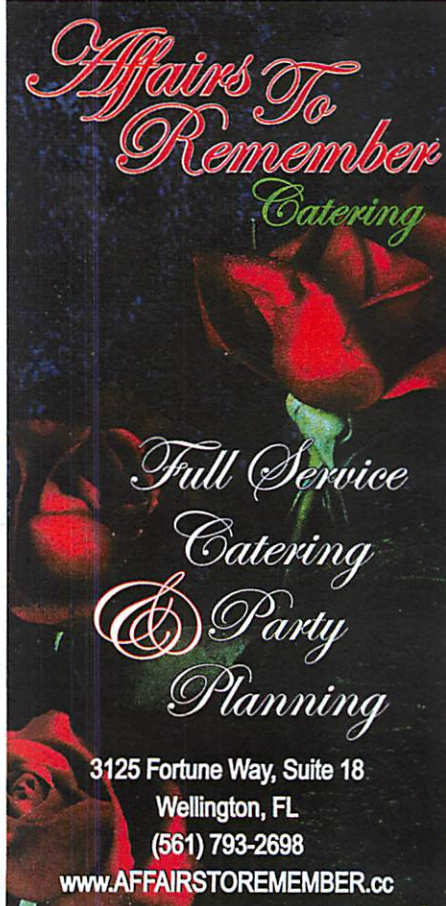


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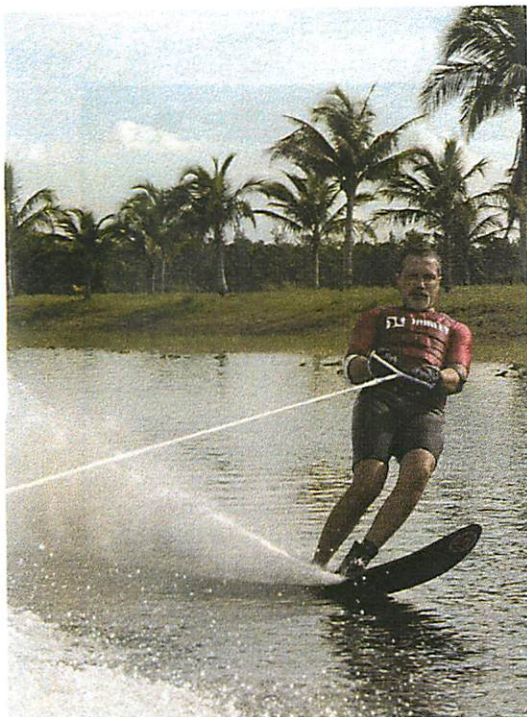


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## A One-Ski Wonder

"You can't be out drinking and smoking and do this — so it's a good thing," Bozicevic said. "You're not going to do this if you're out of shape."

Bozicevic and his wife put in a few hours of practice at Okeeheelee Park about four days a week. Most of that time is spent in preparation and a four-hour session will generally include only one or two 20-minute runs on the water.

"I've learned I have to train for quality not quantity," Bozicevic said. "I need to practice certain things on a certain regimen to be successful. If I ski too much, it's counterproductive."

But Bozicevic also appreciates water skiing because he considers it a family sport. The Goode National Championships is one of the few events in which the youngest entrant is six and the eldest is above 80, he pointed out. Further, it's a healthy environment for families.

Though the Goode National Championship takes place the beginning of August, Bozicevic has only been training since March. After the hurricanes last year, he hurt his shoulder and arm doing repairs. The months between October and March were

hard because he had to get through them without the sport he loves.

"Sometimes I wasn't a real happy person," Bozicevic said. "I went through physical therapy and did all the things I'm supposed to do, and I'm getting better."

Although this year has been hard on him physically, Bozicevic is optimistic about his chances at the national championship.

"I'd like to win the national championship," Bozicevic said. "It's certainly in the ballpark. Even being injured this year, I'm skiing well enough that I could win."

*The 63rd Annual Goode Water Ski National Championships will take place at Okeeheelee Park from Aug. 2 through Aug. 6. Nearly 1,000 water skiers from across the United States will compete. For more information on the event, visit [www.usawaterski.org](http://www.usawaterski.org). ■*

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