

# Kids learn fishing and life skills with sheriff's deputies at first Cops and Bobbers event

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June 25, 2014



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One out of six boats heads onto Lake Koshkonong for Cops and Bobbers.

NEVVILLE—Six-year-old Haylee Doyle enjoyed her morning on the water with Rock County sheriff's deputies.

“I caught a 3-inch sheepshead!” she screamed when asked how she liked the first Cops and Bobbers event Tuesday.

Twenty children ages 7 and older were invited to fish with deputies on Lake Koshkonong. Children interested submitted letters to Sheriff Robert Spoden.

“We received some very touching requests,” Spoden said. “I had a mother ask me if her son could attend the event. His grandfather had just passed the year before and couldn't get himself to fish again. How could I say no to that?”

“Parents have come up to me in the supermarket, thanking me for selecting their children, telling me how excited their kids are,” Spoden said. “Parents are excited, too. It's a great experience for everyone.”

While the focus was on getting kids fishing, it was not the only goal.

“We don't want them getting drunk or doing illegal drugs,” Spoden said. “We are showing them a positive way of interacting with people. It's also a simple way of interacting with nature. It's universal—absolutely anyone and everyone can do it.”

**They launched from the Anchor Inn in Newville.**

Out on the boat, the children learned more than fishing tips.

“One thing I am noticing is that kids these days are so hung up on social media,” Spoden said. “This gives them an opportunity to get away from that and talk to people in a positive format, learning a universal skill that you can do for the rest of your life.”

The children shrieked with laughter as they smiled for photos and told their parents over lunch about their adventures.

“I want to be a pro fisherman when I grow up,” said 9-year-old Kristopher Mahaffey. “I've been fishing since I was really little and wanted to come today because I love fishing. Today, I caught a 6-inch bass.”

The sheriff's office received a \$1,000 grant from the Cops and Kids Foundation to help pay for the event. The found supplied T-shirts, fishing supplies and life jackets.

The foundation worked with the Kohl's and Associates in Action to have volunteers for the event to manage the children.

For every five volunteers, Kohl's donates \$500 to the foundation.

"I took off from school today to volunteer," Brittany Kozak said. "Fishing has become a lost source of entertainment. I think the reason children are getting in trouble these days is because they have nothing better to do.

"Fishing is a great skill to have, plus it keeps them out of trouble," she said.

At least two more Cops and Bobbers events are planned this summer, and the sheriff's office hopes to do it every year.

"We want kids to see police officers in a different light," Spoden said. "It's important for kids to see officers in a fishing hat and a pair of shorts showing them how to catch a bullhead."

The next Cops and Bobbers event will be in Evansville.

"We plan on doing it a lot throughout the county," Spoden said. "We're planning one for Janesville and Beloit. We want to scatter it everywhere, giving as many kids this opportunity that we can."