

Women of the wild

Montezuma program teaches lessons in shooting, archery, kayaking and fishing.

By Rebecca Fishow
Contributing writer

Lee Miller got a big taste of the outdoors for her 49th birthday.

Her 19-year-old daughter, Katie, signed them both up for last Saturday's Women in the Outdoors program at the Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge in Seneca Falls.

"It was a really good present," Miller said. "I grew up in suburbia. . . . I didn't know how

to shoot a gun or kayak."

They mother-daughter duo from Verona did both for the first time — and more. They were joined by about 30 women who participated in the daylong, women-only event sponsored by the National Wild Turkey Foundation.

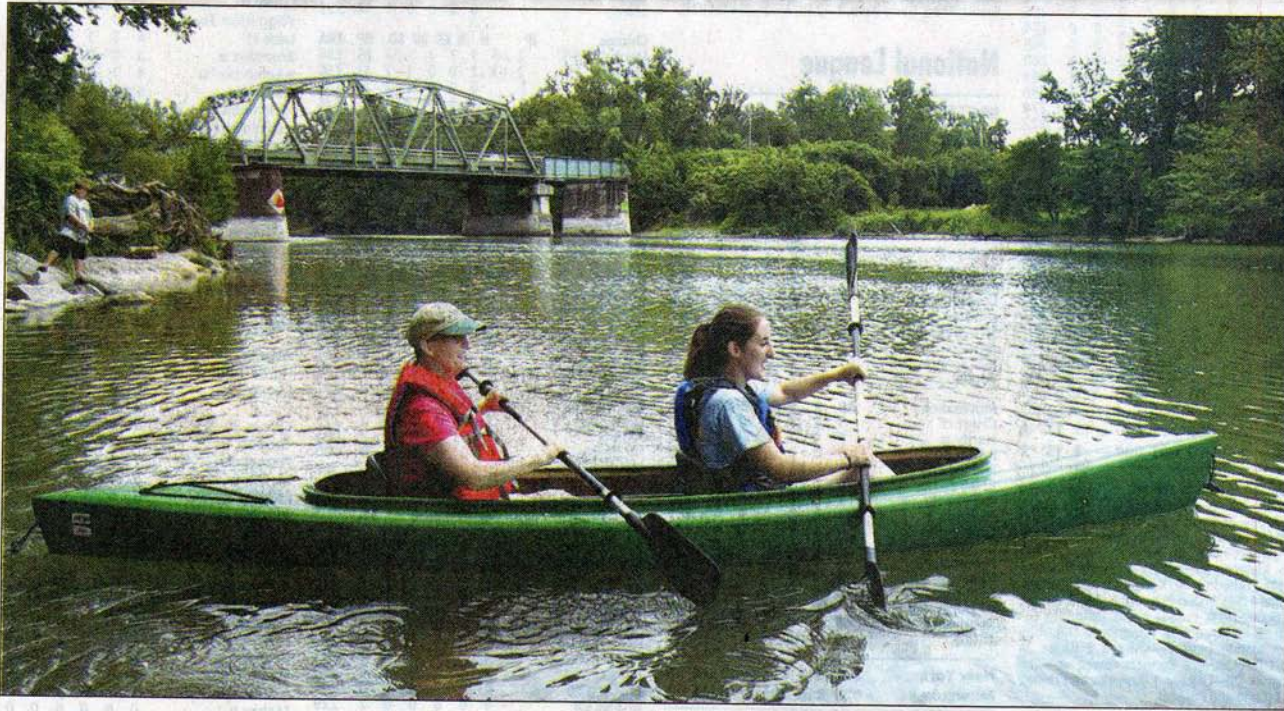
A single ticket cost \$50. The mother/daughter ticket went for \$80. Topics covered included hiking, fishing, kayaking, shooting, journaling, archery, gardening and photography. The roles of wildlife management and the part hunters and other outdoor enthusiasts play in conservation

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David Lassman / Staff photographer

BECKY SCHERER of St. Johnsville (*right*) inflates her life vest with instruction from Barbara Phillips, a representative from Bass Pro Shops who was heading the kayaking segment of the Women in the Outdoors program at Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge.



David Lassman / Staff photographer

LEE MILLER of Verona (*left*) and Katie Hagen of Rome set off into the Seneca River on a kayak. They are participating in the Women in the Outdoors program at Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge.

Outdoors Brims With Fun

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were also covered.

Miller described the day as "absolutely awesome."

There are an increasing number of opportunities for Central New York women to paddle a kayak, fire a shotgun, cast a line or pick up on a multitude of outdoor hobbies or sports, said Pat Thompson, regional coordinator for Women in the Outdoors.

"Most women we find want to try outdoor activities," she said. "The only reason they don't is that no one's asked them."

Women in the Outdoors programs are held nationwide, Thompson said. Trained professionals teach outdoor skills unique to specific regions in the country. Clamming in Rhode Island and wagon driving in Texas are popular classes in those areas, she said. Hunting and water fowl identification are big in Upstate New York.

Saturday, Mary Loesch's eyes lit up as she and five other women approached a table strewn with hunting bows and arrows. In the distance, a strikingly lifelike, deer target awaited their shots.

After a brief introduction on the basics of archery, the 58-year-old Bridgeport woman raised her bow, concentrated and then let her arrow fly. She nailed the target.

"Hey! Good job," the others hollered, praising the first

hit of the class.

Loesch, a retired physical education teacher, said she's always embraced an outdoorsy lifestyle. But it wasn't like that for most women her age, she said.

"A lot of women are not into getting out and getting dirty — at least my generation," she said. "We weren't like tomboys. If you went to college ... you were either a nurse, teacher, secretary or you (had) kids."

Debbie Jahn, of Honeoye Falls, and Karen English, a self-proclaimed "naturalist," from Geneva, learned about medicinal plants during a morning class at Montezuma.

"I was surprised how many plants we call weeds are actually useful," said Jahn, who works as an engineer for the ITT space systems division. "I had one I used to spray weed killer on. Now I know it's a 'heal-all.' And did you realize that mint plants have a square stem?"

Many of those attending said the all-woman environment helped matters.

"If you are a woman without much background, it's good to see there are other women doing this. It's not all men," English said.

Last April, the Onondaga County Federation of Sportsmen's Club's Women in Nature committee held a similar event at the Fayetteville-Manlius Rod and Gun Club. About 50 women participated in rifle

Just do it

Some starting places for women (and men) interested in the outdoors:

Hunting/Fishing/Archery: Each county has a federation of sportsmen's clubs open to female members. For Onondaga County, check out www.federationofsportsmen.com/ or for other Central New York counties click on 01689e2.netsolhost.com/member.htm

Kayaking: Central New York Kayakers, Syracuse, NY, see www.cnykayakclub.com/

Cycling: Onondaga Cycling club, see www.onondagacyclingclub.org/

Outdoor photography: Syracuse Camera Club, see www.syracusecameraclub.org

Birding: Onondaga Audubon Society, www.onondagaaudubon.org/

Rock Climbing: ClimbCNY, www.climbnyc.com/

Hiking/backpacking: Adirondack Mountain Club, Onondaga Chapter, www.adk-on.org/

Scuba: Aquatic world, scuba club www.aquatic-world.com; Auburn Skin Divers Assoc., www.auburnskindivers.org/

Nature Identification and Ecology: Central New York Nature Study Club, www.freewebs.com/cnynaturestudy/

General Nature Enthusiasm: The Nature Club of Central New York, www.natureclubofcny.com/

and target shooting, wild edibles, survival skills, outdoor photography and more activities taught mostly by female instructors.

"We had a huge turnout," said Teri Hubler, chairperson of the committee, which is in the process of planning next year's program.

The Central New York Kayaking Club, which started in 2000 with one woman and three men, now has more than 100 members. About 65 percent are women, said Kathi Kitt, the club's founder. The club meets for trips throughout Central New York every Sunday and caters to novices and experienced kayakers

alike.

Loesch said she will use what she learned from the nature journaling class during her vacation in Montana in a couple weeks. The class taught participants to focus their senses on specific object or sounds in nature, recording what they hear and see.

Lee Miller and her daughter, Katie, said they were surprised how easy kayaking was, dashing any misconceptions that they weren't up to it physically. Both plan to buy one, they said.

"You see them doing it on TV and you just go 'Wow, they're so buff,'" the daughter said.