

LESSONS ON THE WATER



BOAT 3 launches from Veterans Beach Park & Boat Ramp into Lake Jackson for the 2025 Heartland Peacemaker Paddle with Bill Redmon, founder of Removing the Barriers, as the guide. They finished the race in third place.

DIEGO DE JESUS/STAFF

Removing the Barriers

Peacemaker Paddlers race around Lake Jackson

BY DIEGO DE JESUS
 Staff Writer

For its second rendition, the 2025 Heartland Peacemaker Paddle gave consumers of Ridge Area Arc a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to glide along the placid waters of Lake Jackson bright and early. The canoes were ready by 8 a.m. on the Veterans Beach Park & Boat Ramp.

Three 28-foot Langley voyageur-style canoes were moored along the ramp that were provided by Removing the Barriers in partnership with Ridge Area Arc and the Mason G. Smoak Foundation. These canoes would race around an island deeper into the lake around tufts of reeds then back.

Before the race started, everyone enjoyed a Chick-fil-A breakfast and put on sunscreen provided by Duke Energy. Two buses of consumers arrived at the park around 8:50 a.m.

Bill Redmon, founder of Removing the Barriers, instructed the consumers and volunteers on how to use an oar when paddling. He stressed the importance of safety when manning the canoes.

"No false emergencies," Redmon said to the crowd. "I hope everybody understands that. No false emergencies. We're going to take every emergency seriously."

Before climbing into the canoes, volunteers helped the consumers into life jackets then walked onto the ramp.

"We have figured out that some of our individuals don't get the same everyday experiences that we do. Water is a big fear for parents."



BOAT 2 readies to launch from the Veterans Beach Park & Boat Ramp with oars in hand. They placed second in the race.

DIEGO DE JESUS/STAFF

said Kathleen Borde, Ridge Area Arc chief executive officer. "Some of our guys don't know how to swim. Some can't really grasp the concepts of swimming and so they stay away from water, which means they don't end up having water experiences."

They were divided into three boats and each volunteer paired with a buddy. Each canoe had a guide steering the canoe while the rest on board oared toward the direction with Redmon himself guiding Boat 3.

Personnel from Sebring Fire Rescue helped everyone get onto their canoes. Soon after, they launched off the ramp and the race kicked off. On shore, a crowd cheered on the canoes as

PADDLERS | 4A

A4 | HIGHLANDS NEWS-SUN | May 31, 2025

PADDLERS

FROM PAGE 1A

they launched and returned ashore. Boat 1 finished first, Boat 2 second and Boat 3 third.

"Everybody worked well as a team," Redmon said after the race. "That's the best I could tell. The main thing is for the Arc participants to enjoy it and it looked like they did. I appreciate the support from Fire Res-

cue down here. We need them."

All three partners of the event expressed interest in doing another paddle event on Lake Jackson next year, trying to make it annual. Executive Director of the Mason G. Smoak Foundation Deena Wright rode on Boat 2.

"It makes me feel like we are teaching our youth to give back to the community and appreciate everyone for who they are and to love differences," Wright said.



Some on Boat 3 raise their oars in celebration of the race as they return to dock at the Veterans Beach Park & Boat Ramp from the race on Lake Jackson.

DIEGO DE JESUS/STAFF



Supporters cheer on the canoes along the shore as they begin the race into Lake Jackson.

DIEGO DE JESUS/STAFF



Boat 1 and Boat 2 dock back to the Veterans Beach Park & Boat Ramp at the end of the race.

DIEGO DE JESUS/STAFF